

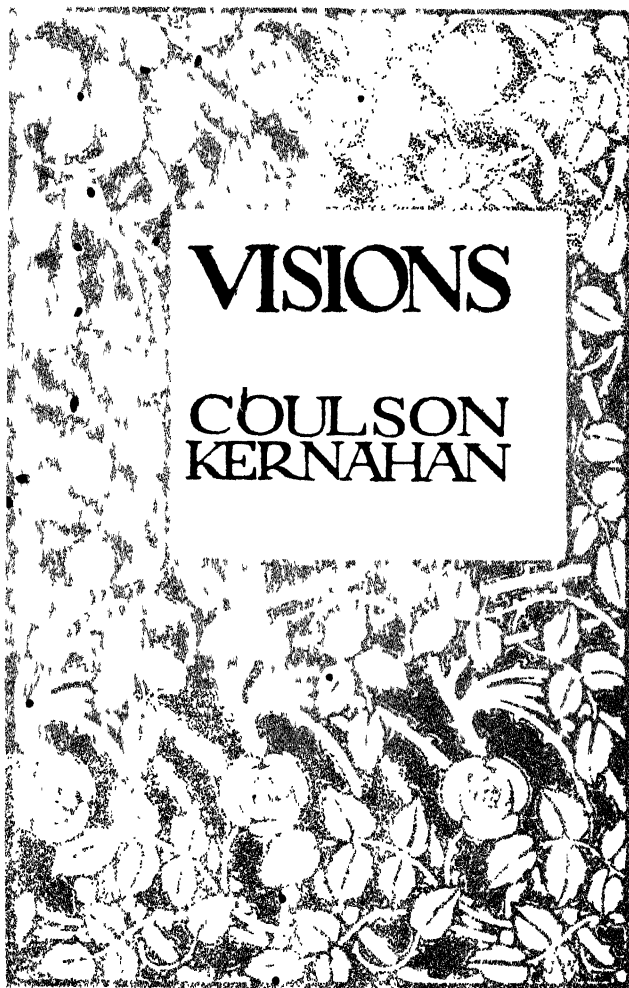
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LONDON HODDER, AND STOUGHTON
27 PATERNOSTER ROW. 1905

TO

J. E. HODDER WILLIAMS

PUBLISHER

MY FRIEND AND FELLOW-CRAFTSMAN

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

•

MR. KERNAHAN'S imaginative work has attracted such unusual attention, and has been so widely circulated that his publishers think the time has come when his four now-famous religious booklets and the remainder of his separately published imaginative writings might with advantage be issued in one volume, especially as they are enabled to include three entirely new pieces.

"The Lonely God," "A Lost Soul" and "The Garden of God," all three from *A Book of Strange Sins*, are included by kind permission of Messrs. Ward, Lock and Co., the owners of the copyright.



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*I have looked on Life: I have looked on
Death. I have pitied, I have sorrowed, I
have smiled. Yet have I no lore save that
which was learned from flowers and little
children, from loving all God's creatures, and
from seeing, in my visions, the Sorrowful
Face.*





WHAT a little thing to set a strong man's heart a-thump! Just a wee sound—half sigh, half cry—from the cot where a child stirs in her sleep. It was not even a troubled cry. It was like the unconsidered, unconscious “chirrup” of some small bird that wakes in the night to nestle more snugly under its mother's wing, and drowns off again even as it chirrups. It was as if, upon the stilled waters of night, a falling rose-leaf had set a-stir a scarcely perceptible ripple. Yet light as is the rose-leaf's kiss upon the water's lips—that kiss trembles, halo-wise, into a circle, the emblem of eternity. And that child's feeble cry seems to me to be a voice calling from the eternities that are gone and from the eternities that are to come.

The Child-Face

Listening to that child's cry, I see, standing behind her, the shadowy line of the unknown dead whence she and I sprang. It is a line which stretches away back into the 'mists of the morning of the world, when God first committed the brimming vase of life into the hands of man, charging him that he and those who came after him should, generation by generation, pass on, unspilt, that purple vase which I, in my turn, have passed on to my child, and she will one day, I hope, pass 'on to hers.

As those ghost voices cry out to me from the dust, I am aware of strange stirrings in the blood that flows in my veins and once flowed in other veins than mine. I am conscious of blind yearnings, of unyielded obediences, of unrendered love, and my hands go groping forth as if to clasp unseen hands that are stretched to me from impenetrable dark; even as now, when I am warm with life, the cold ghost of me, that is to be, stretches wan hands of yearning towards my child's unborn children whom I may never see.

The Child-Face

When I was myself a child I once asked the meaning of the strange knocking within my breast, and was told that it came from a glowing forge where a blacksmith plied his hammer unceasingly upon the anvil. I was told that it was there the bones for my body were welded ; it was there that the blood which ran red and hot—like molten metal—in my veins was warmed, and that the rising and falling of my chest was caused by the constant working of the big pair of bellows that kept the fire alight within. I remember that I accepted the explanation implicitly—so implicitly that, even now, when I hear my own child's cry in the night, and my heart stands still a moment to listen, I fancy that for that moment the blacksmith is poising the withheld hammer high over his head. Then down it comes again, with a lustier blow than ever, and the accustomed and monotonous round goes on until the day when the hammer shall fall from the nerveless fingers, the fire shall flicker up into sudden brightness, and then as suddenly sink to a thin red line, along which it is chased

The Child-Face

to a mere spark, and is finally swallowed up by pursuing night. And where once there had been warmth, life, light, and movement, there shall be only darkness, silence, stillness, cold cinder, and grey ash.

Sometimes it is a pitiful, frightened little cry that reaches me, and to-night it is followed by the pattering of dumpy feet along the landing. Wee fists assail the panels of my door, and a quavering treble pipes : "Fa'ver, I'se afwaid. Let me in !"

As I hush her in my arms I ask myself, whether it is because God would have us, His children, to realise the infinite love of the Divine Father that He, the Creator, permits His creature to enter into, and in a sense to share, the mystery of Fatherhood. I look sometimes into my child's eyes and I ask myself whether she can read and sound the depths of love in mine. One day, perhaps, when she has a child of her own, she will understand that the mere fact of her room being next to mine is a happiness to me, and that my sleep is sweeter because of the sense

The Child-Face

of nearness to¹ her. But in the meantime I often wonder whether as yet she is—even if unconsciously—aware of my love, or whether it is only because I represent to her the buoyant joys of airy up-tossings, because I am associated in her thoughts with the eager interest of new toys, and the thousand and one devices which I contrive for her entertainment, that she bounds gleefully in her nurse's arms at sight of me. "Ah, little one!" I say to myself. "Perhaps the heart of the Divine Father may ache as longingly for some sign of His children's love, as mine is now aching to be assured of yours. Were I to pass out of your sight to-morrow, would you forget me as easily as I forget Him?"

Here I am naturally reminded of Mr. William Canton's poem on this very subject, and remembering it I am silenced as by a rebuke. Instead, therefore, of proffering copper of my own coining, let me assist to circulate the fine gold of his. The poem occurs in "The Invisible Playmate and W. V., Her Book," which stands side by side on my

The Child-Face

shelf with Mr. Barrie's "Margaret Ogilvy." To me it is the "Margaret Ogilvy" of childhood, and if out of all the literature of the last ten years only some half-dozen volumes might remain, I should certainly plead that these two be among them.

I have a little maid who, when she leaves
Her father and her father's threshold, grieves,
But being gone, and life all holiday,
Forgets my love and me straightway ;
Yet when I write,
Kisses my letters, dancing with delight,
Cries "Dearest father !" and in all her glee
For one brief live-long hour remembers me.
Shall I in anger punish or reprove?
Nay, this is natural ; she cannot guess
How one forgotten feels forgetfulness ;
And I am glad thinking of her glad face,
And send her little tokens of my love.

And Thou—wouldst Thou be wroth in such a case ?

And crying Abba, I am fain
To think no human father's heart
Can be so tender as Thou art,
So quick to feel our love, to feel our pain.

When she is froward, querulous, or wild,
Thou knowest, Abba, how, in each offence,

The Child-Face

I stint not patience, lest I wrong the child,
Mistaking for revolt defect of sense,
For wilfulness mere sprightliness of mind.
Thou know'st how often, seeing I am blind ;
How when I turn her face against the wall
And leave her in disgrace,
And will not look at her, or speak at all,
I long to speak and long to see her face ;
And how, when twice, for something grievous done
I could but smite, and, though I lightly smote,
I felt my heart rise strangling in my throat ;
And when she wept I kissed the poor red hands.

All these things, Father, a father understands ;
And am not I Thy son ?

II

I HAVE told you of the thoughts that come and go in my brain as I lie at night hushing my frightened child to my breast, and watching the little eyelids droop over the tired eyes, like the petals of a primrose, as the sense of sweet security and loving companionship lulls her to happy sleep. But the night passes, and it is she and I who are first out of doors in the morning to drink in together a deep, delicious draught of dewy air. There is no such divine intoxicant as is to be found in the blue chalice which morning tilts brimming to our lips. To drink of it is to know why the butterfly is so merry-mad that he must needs skip and dance in his flight. It is the magic philtre which lets us into the secret of bird-song and flower-speech. At the first draught we are

The Child-Face

aware of voices calling to us from the garden. There is a flutter among the flowers, for the rose which they have been so long expecting has arrived with the dawn, and before they were awake to receive her as became her state. There she stands damask-red, and beautiful as some dusky Eastern queen, and around her the sweet-peas are pouting their pretty lips, piqued at our delay, the white pinks are wearing their best frilled petticoats, and the pansies, aproned in royal purple, are impatiently awaiting our arrival that the rose-queen and the child-queen may be duly presented to each other. Scarcely is the ceremony over, and formal calls been made in order of precedence upon the flowers who form the royal court, before the gong summons my little maid and me to breakfast, after which we go our separate ways—I to my work, she to her morning sleep. At luncheon she sits at my side in her high chair, and if no morsel is so sweet to the little one as that which comes off “Fa’ver’s” plate, no meal is so delightful to him as that which is shared with

The Child-Face

his darling. Then luncheon over and my pipe smoked out, away we go, she and I, for an afternoon's holiday - making in the fields. Sometimes, with hand fast clasped in mine and face upturned to listen, she trudges along at my side, all eyes and ears, while I am weaving "a story" for her. Sometimes she elects to be perched in masterful ease on my shoulder; at others she slips the parental cable altogether, now lingering behind, now flitting on in front, now darting bird-like aside at sight of a butterfly or flower. But whatever be the way she travel, she is with me, and I with her, and when that is so, and on such a day, the very intaking of our breath is a joy. The sky spreads above us a shimmering sea of blue—not the cool crystalline sapphire of early morning, but the deep, dense azure of a midsummer noon. How hot the bees must feel in that furry coat! As we lie basking in the sunlight, and watching the buttercups dancing and dipping above the grass, like golden banners upborne amid an army of green-bladed bayonets, we do not wonder, she

The Child-Face

and I, that the bees—like some one with a grievance—grumble monotonously to themselves. We can see the hot air quivering and simmering above the clover fields, but all else is drowsily, dreamily still. The streets of the far-off city are reeking with dusty heat, but here we are in another world, and the birds and the butterflies are our brethren. This meadow is our boundless prairie; our heads are below the level of the grass-tops, which spread filmy arms above us, like the boughs of a miniature forest.

We love, she and I, to feel the wind upon our cheek, to hear it, as it whistles by us, singing in our ears, as in the hollow convolutions of a shell. We love to look out upon the sea or upon open plains and broad sky spaces where there is "eyesight room" and room for our souls to fare forth into the blue. We love to lie and listen to the song of the wind among the pine-trees—the "sailing" pine-trees—and to watch them rock and sway like storm-tossed ships at sea. We love to see the rook beat up against the wind, and poise and hover and soar,

The Child-Face

and slide down upon the edge of the blast with rigid blade-like wings, that shear like a knife. As we watch him cut the ether in circles and half-circles I think of him less as a bird than as some winged artist of the heights, who delights in flowing line and beauty of curve, and to my very limbs is lent something of the buoyancy of his flight.

By and by we come to that sunny stretch of meadowland over which the skylark seems always singing, and where the grass grows so long that the little ones whom, at almost any hour of a summer's day, one is sure to see gathering flowers have to wade, waist high, as they go. This we call "The Children's Meadow," because, as I say, one can rarely pass through it without hearing a pæan of childish laughter—just as we have christened the lane beyond the stile "Lovers' Avenue," because on a summer's evening one seldom passes between the hazel-hedges that overarch, bower-wise above, without finding a coy couple leaning bashfully on the gate, or wandering in front of us in waist-encircled bliss.

The Child-Face

Then we reach the sloping, wind-swept hillside, where we love to lie and watch the slow sailing of stately clouds over our head, or to listen to the tinkle of the brooklet purling over the pebbles in the dell below.

And in my child's joyous wonder at all that is wonderful in this beautiful world, I forget the making of books with which my brain is busied, and when the first flush of rapture is over and the wee brain has sobered into calm, I tell her of Him—once a little child like herself—by Whom this beautiful world was made.

III

It is night again, and once more I am with my child. In the daytime I seem to lose her, but at night she comes back to me, more mine than ever. How many times I have tip-toed, quiet as any mouse, along the passage to her door and peeped in, just to satisfy myself that all was well with her.

Do you remember the opening verses of Mr. Canton's poem, "The Inquisition"?—

I woke at dead of night ;
The room was still as death ;
All in the dark I saw a sight
Which made me catch my breath.

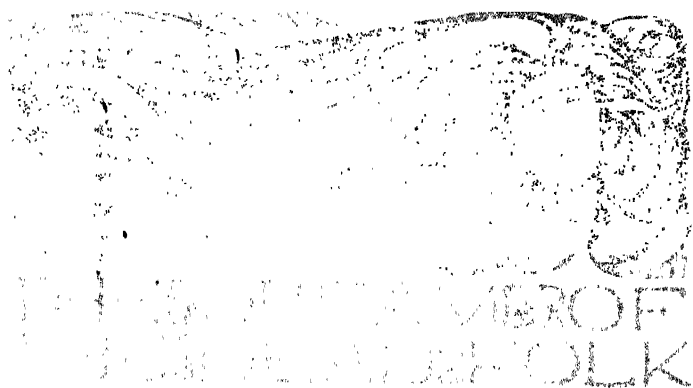
Although she slumbered near,
The silence hung so deep,
I leaned above her crib to hear
If it were death or sleep.

The Child-Face

How often I have done that! How often a cold hand has seemed to shut and hold down the sluice-gates of my heart, as I saw how waxen-white was her face, how stony-still her slumbers. Then a sigh that would scarcely have stirred a feather, or it may be a twitching of the wee hand, that lay as if sculptured in marble outside the coverlet, has brought a "Thank God!" to my lips; the cruel fingers that were clutching at my heart have relaxed their hold, letting the up-gathered blood go racing through my veins again, and I have crept back to the bed which I had left only in a dream. For the little face upon which I had looked was a dream face, a dead face—the saddest of all dead faces—the face of the child that never was.

THE DREAM OF
THE DEAD FOLK





A MAN lay listening to the cry of the wind at midnight ; and as he lay, he fell asleep and dreamt that he was dying.

Just as upon a map one seeks to trace a river from its source to its union with the sea, so he now strove to look back upon his own life and to see it in perspective.

It had seemed to him like a space set between two far-removed marks, but now he saw that every completed human life is a circle ; and though he realised that none may see whence the centre of that circle is taken, he knew that the hand which holds the compasses is the hand of God.

The Dream of the Dead Folk

And the man saw that the arc of his life was fast rounding to a ring, and as he drew nearer to what he had thought was End, he saw that End was already merging into Beginning.

And then—just as the last grain in an hour-glass runs out the swiftest—the remnant of his strength failed him, and he died.

II

SINCE the day when He took our mother Eve from the side of our father Adam, God has caused a deep sleep to fall upon the soul to whom a great change is about to come.

When the man first awoke from the sleep into which he had fallen, he knew that it was night, but he knew not that it is only the souls of the unhallowed dead which awake at night, and that the spirits of those who have passed away in peace awake—greeted by angel-faces—in the sunlight of God's smile, and fare forth, companioned by rejoicing dear ones, among the flowers, the fields, and the happy birds.

But just as the feeble hands of a newly-born babe grope unconsciously for the

The Dream of the Dead Folk

warm bosom under which the little one has long lain—so the poor human soul that awakes, naked and cold from the birth-change which we call death, cries out for the touch of a familiar hand, the consolation of familiar companionship.

When a child awakes, screaming from an evil dream, no assurance of mother or nurse can dispel the illusion so quickly as a sight of the streaming morning sunshine, for then the child knows not only that the imagined monsters of the night are gone, but that they had never existed, and never could exist, except in a dream.

But when the man awoke it seemed to him—so terrible was the sense of evil which hung over him—as if the awakening had come, not to dispel the spectres of sleep, but to make possible and present the impossible horrors of his most hideous dreams.

Fear, abject and craven, crouched cowering at his heart—fear of himself, fear of the perpetual and imprisoning dark, and fear of the mocking shapes that the darkness hid.

The Dream of the Dead Folk

But most of all he feared to be alone, for henceforth he knew that he was deserted of God—that where he was, God was not.

If of the living it has been said that solitude, the withdrawal of oneself from the world, is strength-giving, but that loneliness is the horror of horrors, what shall be said of the loneliness of the dead?

For the living know not what loneliness is. Where life is, there God is, and where God is, none is alone.

But when a naked human soul drifts out on death's tide to that region of outer dark which is emptied of God, then is that soul confronted with *the* Loneliness.

III

WHEN the man was in the body, all things were measured and compelled by his body's needs.

"I must have warmth, for I am cold," he had said; "I must eat, for I am hungry; must drink, for I am thirsty; must sleep, for I am tired."

Now that he was no longer in the body, heat and cold, hunger and thirst, wakefulness and weariness, could affect him never again.

But more cruel than the pangs and slow wasting of hunger, more torturing than the searing and blistering of live flesh by fire, more terrible than the throes of those who, with lolling tongues dry and swollen as puff-balls, drop on the desert sands to die of thirst,

The Dream of the Dead Folk

were the loneliness and the fear of loneliness which lay upon the soul of the man.

And in that awful moment he thought of the mother, whom he had left on earth, the mother to whom, as a child, he had fled in his every sorrow, the mother to whom, even as a man, he had never gone for solace in vain.

And as he so thought, lo! he saw his mother before him. With a cry of joy, he flung himself on his knees beside her, burying his head in her lap, and crying piteously :

“Mother, mother! It is your son!”

But no loving hand was laid upon his head, no loving word was whispered in his ear, and when the man looked into his mother's eyes, he saw that there was no recognition in them.

Then, pressing a pleading hand upon hers, again the man cried out to his mother to comfort him, and again he saw that she sat impassive and unseeing, and, though her lips moved placidly, 'twas but to count the stitches in the work that she held in her hand.

Then the man thought of the wife he loved,

The Dream of the Dead Folk

the mother of his children ; but when he sought her presence, he saw that beside her was one who was whispering words of love in her ear, and the man knew that already he was replaced in his wife's heart.

And, though he called her by name, she, unhearing and unheeding, turned away with laughing eyes, and kissed the lips of the lover who stood by her side.

Then the man thought of the child that he had loved better than he had loved his life, and, as he so thought, the child lay sleeping in its cot before him. And the man bent over the child, calling it by every dear, familiar name ; but the child 'stirred not, nor even so much as smiled in its sleep.

Then the soul of the man turned colder than the clay semblance of himself which lay mouldering in the churchyard.

He knew now that he was alone indeed, for he knew that he was dead, and that in the kingdom of outer dark, the dead seek no companionship with the dead.

It is from the living—the lords of life—that

The Dream of the Dead Folk

the lonely dead folk crave the companionship which can never be theirs.

To no living ear are dead voices audible, by no living eyes are dead shapes seen, and though the dead may go to the living—though they cannot help but go to the living—they may not by so much as a word, by so much as some old familiar household sign, make known their presence and their needs to the happy live folk who stand in the sun.

Else were the joy of life for ever gone, for could the live folk see but once the piteous spectres—mendicants of a moment's companionship—that throng the way, as figures throng a church door; the stricken shapes that crawl like dogs to their feet, craving the solace of a single recognising look; the haggard hunted faces that people the dark; the imploring arms outstretched on every side—could the live folk see all this, then were life no longer a lordly palace, but a leper house.

But for the dead folk, the live folk have no eyes, for the dead folk the live folk have no ears, and soon those pallid shapes, aweary of

The Dream of the Dead Folk

waiting for the look, the word, the caress that never come, pass out, the prey of utter hopelessness, into the night—only again to return to the presence of the living, again to urge their unavailing prayers, and again to be driven forth of despair into the night.

IV

EVEN so the soul of the man fled forth from the presence of the loved ones out of whose lives he had for ever passed.

And as he fled, a thousand menacing shapes sprang up to gibber, ape-like, at him ere they, too, were swallowed up of night.

And as they shrank from him, so the man shrank from them ; for in the realm of outer dark, the shapes that flit athwart the gloom go lonely as lepers, who, unclean themselves, see only in others their own uncleanness, and so come to loathe and to fear each other, even as they loathe and fear themselves.

Then—more poignant than the longing of a mother for her dead child, more irresistible than the lust of a drunkard for drink, more desperate than the soldier's last fight for dear

The Dream of the Dead Folk

life—the cruel, crushing fear of his incommunicable loneliness came over the man. And ever he pressed on panic-stricken into the night, and ever he was pursued as by ravening wolves by the fear that lurked at his heart.

And as he fled he was aware of the rising of the wind ; and he was aware, too, that just as a tempest lashes the surface of the sea into angry and contending waves, so the wind, as it gathered in strength, was lashing into blind hate his own soul, and the souls of them that peopled the outer dark.

He still feared and shrank from the shapes that he saw around, just as they feared and shrank from him, but he knew that in them, as in him, every gust that blew was goading fear into ungovernable and murderous fury, and that soon, like caged lions, which, chafing at imprisonment, turn the one to rend the other, so he and they would soon be at each other's throats.

Then in that domain of darkness the man heard the wind's bugle-call to battle, and saw the rabble of the dead massing into devil-led

The Dream of the Dead Folk

legions, that hurled themselves the one upon the other in bloody and insatiate hate.

And with a great cry the man awoke, and knew that he had been dreaming.

The casement stood open, and as he heard the wind sweep past like charging cavalry, he thought of the contending cohorts of the damned, and the man knelt by the window to breathe a prayer for the souls in outer dark.

Then suddenly the wind dropt, and from the heart of the night a mournful cry was borne, even as the cry of gulls far out at sea is borne inland upon the wind.

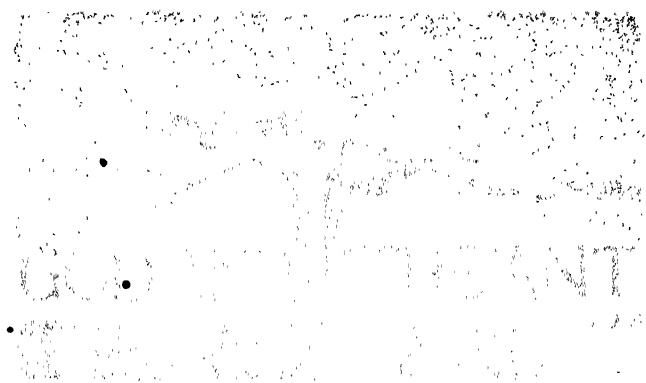
And again the man thought of the lonely dead folk.

And again he knelt in prayer.

GOD



AND THE
ANT



I SAW, in a dream, the End of the World. I had thought to behold the sea give up its dead, the graves open, and the countless companies of the sleepers roll up—like mist from off the face of the earth—to heaven. I had thought to hear the Last Trump sounding; to see the heavens part like a rent veil; and to behold God, seated in terrible majesty upon the clouds, while innumerable legions of shining angels waited His bidding to marshal the vast armies of the dead to their place before the judgment bar of heaven.

But that which I had thought to see, I saw not, that which I had thought to hear, I heard not, for God gave no sign, nor any of His angels; and excepting that around me were the souls of all who had lived and died on the

God and the Ant

earth, I had not known that the Great Day of Judgment was indeed come.

And though the number of the dead was many million millions, I saw that all were gathered together as one man. For to them that are in the Spirit, Space and Place and Time are not. One says no longer, "I am here," or "I go there," for "Here" and "There" are lost in one ever-conscious "I am,"—just as Yesterday and To-morrow, Past and Future, are merged into one unending Now.

The Last Day was indeed come, but it was God and not man who was bidden to the bar of heaven ; it was the Creator not the creature who was called to judgment.

As with one voice the people cried aloud, saying : "Come forth, Thou who wouldst judge us, and make answer for the wrongs Thou hast done to man."

But God made no sign.

I saw in my dream, that from among that vast assembly, gathered together—like sheep without a shepherd—upon the plains of

God and the Ant

Eternity, there arose one with uplifted arms, who cried upon God, saying :

“Why hast Thou awakened us, O God? We were a-weary and glad to be at rest ; for though Thou didst make the spirit willing, Thou didst make the flesh weak ; though Thou didst ordain that man should be a little lower than the angels, Thou didst also ordain that he should be not far removed from the brutes. And we were a-weary of warring against lusts which we had not strength to overcome ; a-weary of hoping hopes too high for us to attain ; and we were glad—so glad!—to be at rest. Why hast Thou awakened us, O God?”

And again the people cried : “Come forth Thou who wouldst judge us, and make answer for the wrongs Thou hast done to man!”

But God made no sign.

Then spoke a woman, wailing : “Thou knowest my life, O God! that I was poor—so poor!—and unlovely, and alone. And each day I awoke so weary that I had scarce the strength to struggle up that I might go

God and the Ant

forth to work for the day's bread. And night after night I laid me down so tired—too tired to sleep. And, as I lay, the unendurable thought of the burden which I must take up on the morrow—and every morrow ; and the still more unendurable thought of dying, and being thrust down among foul and rotting things into black nothingness and decay, set my heart leaping like the heart of the hunted and desperate creature which hears the hounds behind it, but sees no nook or cranny into which to creep that it may escape their cruel fangs.

“And so I lived, with the shadow of death and the burden of life ever upon me ; and now when my long slumber has come at last—when death's horror and life's hatefulness lie behind—now Thou hast called me back to the old burden and the old pain. Why hast Thou awakened us, O God?”

And the people said: “Where is He who would judge us? Why comes He not forth to answer for the wrongs He has done to man?”

God and the Ant

But still God made no sign.

Then spake a man, saying :

“Have we not long enough been Thy pitiful butt and jest, Thou Great Derider of the Heavens, that Thou needest to waken us out of our sleep to make sport for Thee again! 'Twere well done in Thee to set our little puppet-play of a world a-going, that our tiny woes and tears might afford Thee beguilement and diversion. 'Twere well done in Thee to make a seeming of goodness, by giving us gifts of love and friendship, that when they had most become part of our lives, Thou mightest mock us by taking them from us again. 'Twere a jest of infinite humour to make life sweet that Thou mightest take it from us when sweetest ; to set us in the condemned cell and prison of the earth, that we might behold our companions taken out one by one, as it were, to execution, not knowing but that it might be our turn to be summoned next. But that when the death we so feared was faced and over, and the long-sought sleep had come at last, Thou shouldst waken us to

God and the Ant

make sport for Thee again, were a rare jest truly! Give Thee joy of Thy jest, O God! but wilt Thou not come forth that we may have sight of so cunning a humorist?"

And the people cried out: "Come forth Thou who makest mock of us; and answer for what Thou hast done."

But still God made no sign.

Then spake again a woman:

"In sin was I conceived, among thieves and prostitutes was I born. What chance had I, who was brought up, even as a child, to the vilest sin, as to a trade—what chance had I to be other than what I am? Of mine own will came I not into the world, but of Thine. Answer, then, Thou who didst create a creature, foreknowing that that creature must perish everlastingly—answer for the deed Thou hast done."

And the people cried out: "Answer, O God! for the deed Thou hast done."

But yet God made no sign.

Then spake one, saying: "'Twas a cruel

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deed and wanton, though at least this woman suffers for the sins she did herself commit.

“ But what say ye to a God who makes the innocent to suffer for the guilty ; yea, whose boast it is that He visiteth the sins of the fathers upon the children who did no wrong ? Had any earthly judge dared, in the name of justice, to pronounce such judgment and to call it ‘ good,’ the people would have arisen as one man, cursing him and casting him out as unworthy of his office. Is good evil, and evil good, because God doeth it ? And shall the Judge of all the earth do wrong, and none be found to call iniquity, iniquity ? ”

And the people cried : “ What are our sand-like sins compared to Thine ? Come forth Thou who boasteth that Thou dost make the innocent to suffer for the guilty ! Come forth, and answer for what Thou hast done ! ”

And yet God made no sign.

And as the people so cried, there arose from among them a woman, entreating them to give ear to her, saying :

“ That evil might work out its own exceed-

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ing bitter punishment—and for guilty parents to know that they have inflicted upon their children a heritage of woe, must be bitter indeed!—God suffered it that some share of the consequences of what the parents have done amiss should descend to the children.

“ But do not the same children profit by the things in which the parents have done well? And how shall they share the good, if they do not suffer by the evil?

“ Shall He who is infinite Justice become, as it were, a juggler, to conjure evil into good? And know ye not that were not misery swift to overtake ill-doing, man had long since made a hell of God's fair earth? And shall God work miracles, day by day, to save man from the consequences of man's own evil deeds?

“ But who of us can truly say of our lives, that the evil *was* greater than the good?—that the gladness *was* less than the grief? For every tear that starts to the eye, our lips have worn a thousand smiles. Love and friendship and little children, fields and flowers, sea and

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sky, sunshine and starlight, have made life glad and beautiful.

“I say not that there is no misery in the world, for were all things made plain, where were then the test of our faith in God?

“Not in the profession of blind optimism, not in shutting our eyes to the mysteries which surround us, and by protesting ‘All’s well with the world, *therefore* will I trust in God,’ does faith consist.

“If we have the fearlessness of perfect faith, we say: ‘Here is mystery dark and terrible! here are suffering and sorrow, the loving purpose of which it passeth human wisdom to comprehend. Yet must I cling to the faith that God is good; and in regard to the sorrows I see, the suffering I endure, I must through all—in spite of all—trust Him, and hold to Him though He slay me.’ For is not our God Himself a suffering God, who sends us no sorrows Himself has not undergone? And who that witnessed the sufferings of His Son—and were *ever* sufferings like to His?—could have foreseen that the cruel Cross on

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which He hung should hereafter be the Finger-post to point the way to heaven? or that sounding through the Saviour's cry of agony in the garden, God heard the triumph-song of a ransomed world?

“When you were children, you so took your childish griefs to heart that life looked to you like an eternity of woe, and your tiny sorrows made sorrowful the whole world. Are the tears of the child less bitter and less real than the tears of the man?

“But of these childish sorrows, how many remained beyond the hour which called them forth? how many of the griefs, over which you sobbed yourselves to sleep, endured till the morning? how many are there of which as much as the memory of them remains to you now?

“And when the White Morning of Eternity has dawned at last, and you stand forth like children newly risen—strong in your noble manhood, beautiful in your nobler womanhood, and made perfect in the image of God—then shall your bitterest woe seem of as little

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moment to you, as the tear which glistens in the eyes of childhood, even while the laugh leaps to the lips.

“Yet we—His children—have thought to fathom the ways and wisdom of God by our ways and our wisdom, thinking that our little minds could encompass and set bounds to the Infinite Mind. Can the ant crawl up into the brain of man to see man’s world as man sees it? Yet has man, whose whole world is, in the eyes of God, but as one ant in a universe, thought to creep into God’s brain, to think as He thinks, to see as He sees, and to judge the Omnipotent by man’s little laws.

•

“One there is among you, whom I heard crying out that he was a drunkard, because his father was a drunkard before him. Then is his the greater shame, seeing that he fell not into sin unwarned and unawares. And for every one who is a drunkard because his father was a drunkard before him, are there not many who have taken warning by their father’s sin, and will neither touch nor taste

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the accursed thing, so that good has, in very truth, come out of evil?

“A woman among you has said that she was a prostitute because her mother before her was a prostitute, and has bidden God make answer for creating a creature, foreknowing that that creature must perish everlastingly.

“But can she foresee into eternity to know what gifts are in store for her from Him who has said that each shall be judged by his light—that from them to whom little is given, little shall be required?

“And know ye not that the misery of the world is of man’s, not of God’s making?

“By man’s tempting, not by God’s decree, did yonder woman’s mother fall; and therefore man’s sin and man’s punishment are the greater.

“But who was it that, making in God’s name, laws unto themselves more abominable in His eyes than the rites of heathendom, shut fast in her face the only door by which the wandering sheep, that He sent His Son to

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save, could have returned to the fold—who but her sister-women?

“Who was it that let the sinning-against come and go in their midst, but drew aside their skirts, as if her very touch were contamination, from the sinned-against, and by their looks, their words, or it may be their very silence, hounded her out from among them, driving her, in the very recklessness of despair, from bad to worse, from sin to infamy—who but the very Christian women who should have been the first to hold out a hand to save?

“It is women who would have us to believe that the weakness of an unguarded moment must mean a lifetime's pollution; that chastity is the one and only thing which, once lost, can never be regained; and who, by robbing God's creatures of their birthright of self-respect and hope, have set open a gate to hell in every home. Who was it that dared to arrogate and narrow down, to one negative meaning, the sacred names of ‘virtue,’ ‘chastity,’ ‘purity,’ and ‘honour’? Think ye that she who, for the sake of his money, marries

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the man she does not love, who sells, herself shamelessly and sordidly—white body and woman soul—for so many hundreds or thousands of golden coins is less ‘fallen’, than she who is a mother but not a wife? Think ye that they only are ‘immoral’ who have broken *one* law of God?—that the woman whose lips are defiled by lies is ‘virtuous’ though her body be chaste, or that a harlot is more hateful in the sight of Heaven than the woman who has set on foot a slander against her neighbour?

“Ye do well to call into question the justice of a God who, if He had not tempered justice with mercy, but had ‘meted out punishment to you according to your deserts, had not suffered your iniquities and your hypocrisies thus long, but had arisen in righteous wrath to strike out your names from the Book of Life.

“Stand forth ye church-going, form-observing women, chaste, some of you, more from self-consideration and fear of the world than from love of purity or fear of God, or haply, because you have never been tempted; stand

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forth ye who have pronounced judgment upon your neighbours, calling this woman 'fallen' or that man 'lost' whom ye shall find among the honoured and loved of God; stand forth • ye who have dared even to pronounce judgment upon your Maker—stand forth, and take your place at the bar to which ye have summoned Him!"

The woman ceased, and as her voice died away, there arose one upon whom all eyes were fixed. And he spoke to the people, saying :

"I am he who, when in like straits to yours, did blaspheme as you, O my brothers and sisters, have blasphemed; I am he who hung by the dying Saviour—he who in the hour of death and judgment did revile that Divine Sufferer, even as you in your hour of judgment have blasphemed the most Holy Name of God. I am he whom, these many a hundred years, ye have called the 'impenitent thief,' knowing not the infinite mercy and power of God.

"For, be it known to you that, as I hung in

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that Sacred Presence, I saw, ere my spirit fled, the people mocking and reviling Him, even as I—foul sinner that I am—had mocked and reviled Him. And I saw that, 'even as He had answered me not, so He answered them never a word, but lifting His eyes to heaven, He prayed to His God and theirs, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!'

"And as He thus prayed, He turned and bent on me, me, the outcast, the blasphemer, the vilest and most impenitent of all that vile and impenitent throng, such look of Divine dignity, such look of infinitely pitying and pardoning love, that, though my anguish-racked body, heavy with approaching death, hung, dragging its dead weight from the cross,—I forgot the straining of my torn and quivering hands against the cruel nails, forgot the thousand tortures which each heart-throb sent through every nerve and limb; forgot shame and death and judgment, in wonder and worship and love.

"To your knees, O brothers and sisters, and

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sue for pardon, that even as I—outcast and blasphemer—obtained mercy at that last moment of my life, so may ye, blasphemers and impenitent, be forgiven by the intercession of the same Saviour who laid down His life for us all !”

And many of the people, greatly trembling, cried out :

“ He speaketh truly. Let us kneel before the God against whom we have done this thing, and ask forgiveness in the name of the Saviour Christ, who laid down His life for us all !”

Then uprose one who spoke mockingly :

“ Make not ye Christians too great a boast, that your Christ did lay down His life for others? Think ye that none but the Christ has suffered death that others might live? The Christ *did* lay down His life to save a world, knowing that in recompense He should receive a kingly guerdon ; but men—aye, and feeble women—have laid down theirs to save a single soul in that world, though they looked for no reward. He, to win the love of a wor-

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shipping universe, endured death willingly, assured that when His sufferings were accomplished, He should inherit eternal bliss. They, for the sake of a brother-man or, sister-woman—aye, for the sake of a principle or a creed—feared not to face the wild beast's fang, the martyr's fire, and died, praising God and glorifying His name. And this they did, knowing not whether the death, which they went forth of their own accord to meet, be the Great Mesmerist, the Shadow of whose hand, when it falls upon our faces, calls us from Life's sleep and trance to Eternity's awakening; or whether he be the Great Destroyer, at whose transmuting touch man's spirit flickers out, and is no more, and man's body dissolves again into the dust whence it sprang.

“Who is this Christ that He should rule over us? Think ye that His triumph was dearly bought, who for a few short hours upon the Cross is recompensed by the throne of Heaven?”

And some of the people murmured, saying :

“He speaketh truly. The sorrows of the

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Christ *were* but for a season. These many a hundred years has He reigned secure in the bliss of heaven, while upon earth, each minute, a human heart was breaking. Hunger and thirst, heat and cold, weariness of body and sickness of soul, have been our portion. Death and disease have had their cruel will of us, and on every side was heard the cry of mothers mourning for their children, children for their mothers, wives for husbands, and husbands for wives. Some of us died, starved for want of bread for the body; others—and theirs the bitterer pang—heart-starved for the want of the sympathy and love, without which they could not live.

“And so we passed our days—haunted by the fear of death, and prey to disease and torture, while He who calls Himself the Saviour of man smiled down on us serenely from the heavens, His sorrows long while forgotten in eternal bliss.”

But others crying out upon the name of the Saviour Christ turned from him who had thus spoken, saying :

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“This man uttereth blasphemies.” Where-
at he spoke again, and mockingly :

“Where is this Saviour of Men, this Christ
who tarrieth so long ?

“What if your God—the jealous God—have
slain Him, saying, ‘Lo! this Christ, this God-
Man, has become greater than I, and draweth
all men unto Him! Come, let us slay Him,
that the people may have none other God but
Me.’”

And as the mocker so spoke, I saw in my
dream, as I looked upon that vast assembly,
that ONE was standing in their midst, of
whose coming none had been aware—One
whose features were the features of a man,
but whose face was the face of God.

All silently and unseen He came, as once
of old to His disciples, but upon that vast
assembly there fell a hush like the silence
which follows prayer. .

And turning to him who had last spoken,
the Christ made answer :

“Thou who hast throughout the world’s
history put it into the heart of man to do

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devilries which no human passion could inspire, which none but a devil could prompt—thou the author of all blasphemies and all evil, who of old didst stir up war in heaven, tempting the very angels of God to their fall, comest thou at the last, thinking to work the eternal ruin of man?”

Then turning to the people He said :

“Look ye for the second coming of the Christ?”

And with one voice the people chanted :

“We look for the Second Advent of the Christ, who shall come again with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead. Whose Kingdom shall have no end.”

And in a voice of infinite and wearied sadness, He made answer :

“Even so of old awaited the Jews the Coming of the Messiah. They looked for a King and a Conqueror, and lo! there came unto them a helpless babe! And even so, come I unto you again—the victim, not the victor, the crucified, not the crowned, the Christ of Calvary and Gethsemane, the bearer

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of all your burdens, the sufferer for all your sins.

“Did you indeed think, beloved, that while you were suffering and sorrowing on earth, I, your elder Brother and Saviour, could rest content in the bliss of heaven?—that I ceased to share your sorrows when my earthly life was at end?

“O mothers, who mourned for your children, it was *My* heart that brake when you fell sobbing by that tiny bed! O little children! every hair of whose head is sacred unto Me, to spare whose little feet one step on a thorny road, I would endure and gladly a Calvary of woes! O weary men! O lonely women! whose every sorrow I have known, at whose every tear this heart of mine has bled—think you that any nail which wounded these hands, these feet, on Calvary’s Cross, stabbed Me with so cruel a pang, as that which pierces My soul at any sin or sorrow of yours?

“You have suffered for a lifetime, but I, until time shall be no more; and even as every sorrow of yours has entered into My

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heart, so has every sorrow of Mine entered into the heart of the Father.

“ Said I not unto you that, ‘ Lo, I am with you alway, *even unto the end of the world*’ ? and thought you, that I could be with you, and not feel with you, sorrow with you, suffer with you ?

“ But now is that end indeed accomplished ; now are the powers of darkness for ever overcome ; now is death, the last enemy, destroyed ; and now render I up the Kingdom to my Father, that God may be All, and in All.”

Whereat my dream passed, and I awoke—awoke so suddenly that I carried with me, into the waking world, the words of a dream-world prayer : “ Lord Christ, who hast borne, and dost continually bear, the burden of all our sins and the burden of all our woes, grant that I, at least, may never wound Thy heart, may never add to Thy burden, by any wilful sin of mine ! ”

In at my open window, singing from the gates of morning, came the cool sweet air of

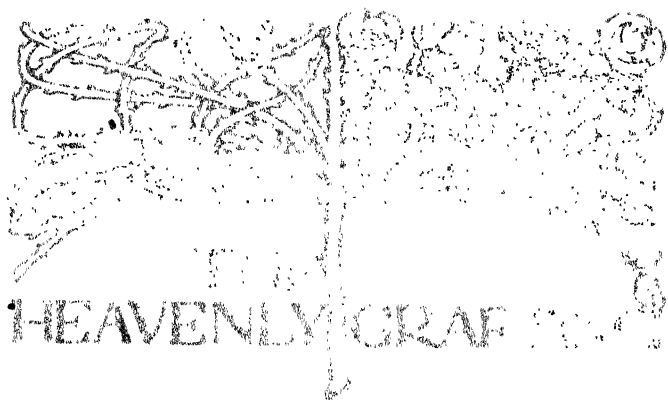
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early dawn. And as I arose and looked out, I saw the rising sun burst—like an incoming sea against a breakwater—through a dense bank of cloud, flooding and glorifying the haggard streets of London with glamour of wizard gold. Above me—upraised like the draped arm of a priest who holds the cross on high as he pronounces the benediction—I saw the purple dome of the Cathedral, upbearing the golden cross that soars above the city.

And, as I looked, the rays of the low-lying sun broke forth behind the brooding and cross-crowned dome, casting the shadow, slant-wise, and thrown out into vast proportions, across street and square.

Below me, in the street, hurrying to their work, I saw pass and repass, haggard men and careworn women ; but in every face I saw the sorrowful face of Christ ; and over the great city—yea, over God's whole world—I seemed to see resting

THE SHADOW OF A CROSS.



IN THE GARDEN OF GOD
THE HEAVENLY GARDEN

GOD, the great Gardener, looked upon that little patch of garden ground—a mere speck among the myriad worlds in space—which we call the earth.

And God said: "Many and fair are the flowers abloom in my earth-garden. Yet in all the world there is no flower so fair as a good woman, and in all the world there is no woman so good as Mary the maiden of Nazareth in Galilee. Here is Humanity at its highest. Out of the dust have I fashioned man, and upward from the dust have I led him, step by step, and stage by stage.

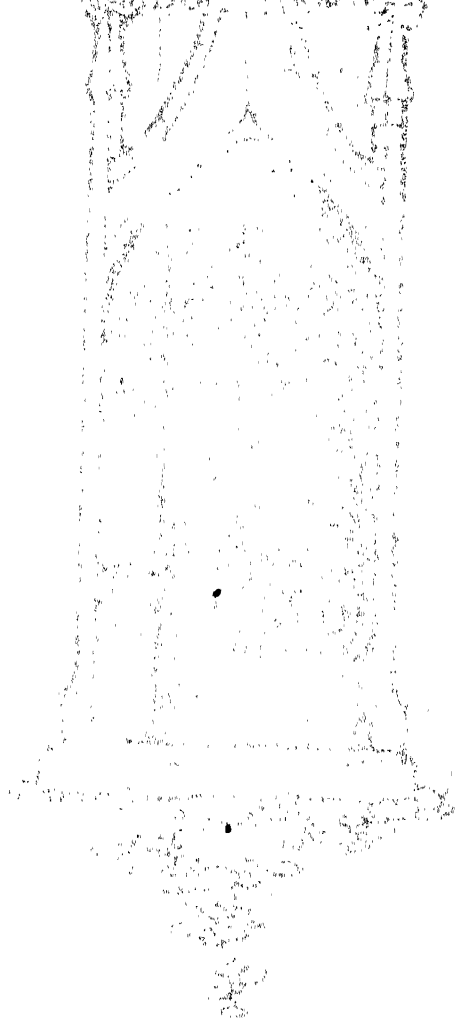
The Heavenly Grafting

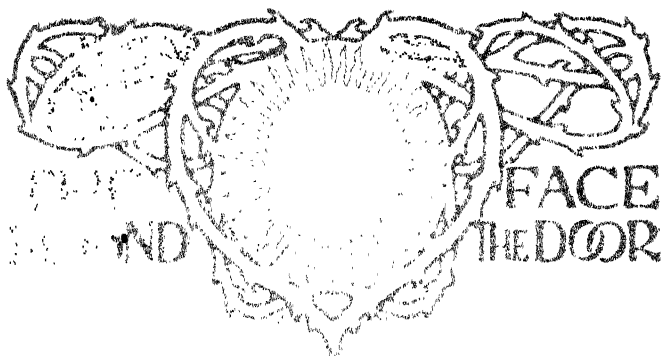
Here is the culminating point. Higher than this, unaided by me, Humanity may not attain, for in this maiden I behold Humanity's fairest and most perfect flower. Yet the earth-flowers bloom but to wither and to fall. Here shall the old order change, for upon this, the fairest and most perfect flower abloom in the garden of earth, will I engraft the Flower of all flowers that blooms in the garden of heaven. Upon Mortality I will engraft Immortality, upon the Human I will engraft the Divine. And the blossoming of the Flower that shall come of that union shall bring, to all the gardens of the world, Eternal Spring. The dead weeds of the world shall lie lifeless where they have lain, but wherever a flower has bloomed and fallen,—there shall come—with the coming of that Flower which is called the Christ,—a stir at the dry roots, a quickening of the sleeping sap, and lo! all the gardens of the world shall bloom again, and no flower which has once bloomed shall ever die."

The Heavenly Grafting

And, man—man that until the coming of the Christ knew scarcely more of God than the caterpillar which has climbed to the top of its blade of grass, and can climb no farther, knows of the heaven beyond—who shall say where the upward evolution of man shall end, since into humanity has come a power outside itself that makes humanity divine?

THE PLACE
OF THE
GODS IN THE
COSMOS





A MAN who was lonely of soul sought the solitude of his chamber on Christmas night.

To the young, Christmas is a season of gladness, but the man was no longer young, and though, rather than mar the gladness of others, he had put aside his sorrow, and taken part with smiling face in the day's rejoicing, yet now that the little ones lay snugly abed (each tiny fist fast closed upon that talisman of happy dreams, a treasured toy)—now that the lights were lowered and the last guest gone, the smile dropped, a discarded mask from his face, as he seated himself, with unseeing eyes, by the ashes of a dead fire.

He remembered that, earlier in the evening, the fire had shone out upon him, like the

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welcome upon a loved face ; that all the warmth and light and cosiness had seemed centred and reflected there as in a mirror, and he had marvelled to think that what at one moment had been dry tinder and dead clod should spire at a touch into live spirits of leaping flame, like the dust upon which God breathed when He said, "Let there be life!"

But now the dead fire seemed to gather to itself all the menace of the night, all the gloom and iciness that shuddered in each corner of the chamber. The heart of it that had once burned red now seemed to freeze black, like an imagined moon, unwarmed and unlighted by any sun. The stealthy cracking of the cinders, as they contracted, chilled him as the ominous cracking of ice chills the heart of the skater. Yet the man sat on, his hands splayed open, palms outward, brooding over the spot where once had been the blaze, even as the sick in soul brood over a vanished sorrow.

And as he sat it seemed to him that an

Beyond the Door

Angel stood beside him, so that the haggard room was filled with warmth and colour and light.

And the Angel said :

“ The Christ is heavy of heart because of you. The Christ whom, on this, His day of days, you have utterly forgotten, has, this day, borne you in especial remembrance. He has seen that, full as is your life, yet one thing there is for lack of which you let what remains of your youth consume away as by a wasting fire ; one thing the absence of which turns all your sunshine to shadow.

“ Wherefore, that the cause of your sorrow may evermore be removed, this is His Christmas gift to you—that whatever you shall this day wish shall, this day, be granted.”

And looking at him wearily, the man made answer :

“ How know I that your master be not the same Satan who, ere this, to achieve infernal purpose, has assumed angelic guise? You come to me saying, ‘ The kingdoms of this world and the glory thereof are yours for

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the asking. Speak your wish and it shall be granted.' But even so of old have others been tempted of Satan. What sign then have you whereby to satisfy me that your errand is not of Hell, but of Heaven?"

And the Angel said :

"A baby boy lay once upon his mother's knee. His parents were poor, and the child's birth-chamber was humble and rude—a mere shed to shelter them from wind and rain—and very dark.

"The child's earliest memory was the starry shining of his mother's eyes. There was a time when all his world was heavened under the fair firmament of her face. Its stooped oval was scarcely less steadfast in his little heaven than the sun is daily steadfast in your sky, and even when he let his eyes stray from her eyes, and wander away from the pure arch of her brows into what, to his baby eyes, seemed infinite space—there were always her eyes to which to come back, when the little wanderer felt cold and lonely and forlorn.

Beyond the Door

“ But one day the child awoke from sleep to find the heaven of his mother’s face had gone. With a cry of fear he raised his head to look for her. . Instinctively his baby eyes were drawn to a *something* which glimmered white and square in the darkness—the one rude window that lighted the place. It was but a rectangular hole, cut in the side of the shed, open to the outer air, and unprotected save for the fact that two iron bars—one stretching from top to bottom, the other from side to side—had been set therein to close the way against the entrance of prowling thief or wild creature of the plain.

“ Did that little child, looking now for the first time at the Cross, thus outlined against the twilight sky—did that little child dream of the close of an awful day to come, when three stark and cross-hung figures should be seen against the darkening skies of a world that had crucified its God?

“ For that little child was the Christ, and the sign for which you ask, whereby to prove that I come to you in His Name, is the sign

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of the Cross, which I now make between you and me. Is it enough?"

The Angel paused, but, with unseeing eyes astare, the man sat unmoved, and answered him never a word.

Again the Angel spoke :

"Haply you are still unsatisfied and seek less simple a sign.

"Is there not in that very simplicity—that elemental simplicity—something of deliberate and Divine intention? The soldier may perish in the desert where is never a stone to mark his grave, but his comrades lash one twig upon another, and over the desolate resting-place, of him whom Christ died to save, is set the symbol of Eternal Life. Once the badge of infamy, to-day it stands for all that is highest in humanity, divinest in God, for in naught else is God so divine as in the humility that stooped to take upon Himself man's mantle of flesh, man's sorrows, and man's doom."

The Angel paused, and waking as it were from a dream, the man answered him sadly :

Beyond the Door

“ If any sign I seek, it is a sign whereby to assure myself that you are not an imagined creature begotten and born in my own sick brain. For this night, as I sat here, I held commune with myself, and to myself I said, ‘Were an angel from God—were God Himself—to appear before me, bidding me wish the wish of my heart, and it should be granted, I should ask not riches, nor fortune, nor fame, nor the applause of men, nor the love of women, but only the assurance of Eternal Life.’ ”

II

THEN said the Angel :

“In all ages of the world there have been men and women—among them many of earth’s noblest—who are sceptics by nature, who seem constitutionally incapable of accepting aught which cannot be proved.

“Upon such as they, God forbid that you or I should sit in judgment. What they believe, or do not believe, must rest between themselves and God. But when a man who has once been of the company of the faithful, and has in very truth entered into the inner mysteries which are revealed only to the eye of faith, falls from faith, as you have fallen, then indeed is Christ wounded in the house of His friends; then indeed are we in the presence of tragedy dire and terrible. That

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such an one should come to believe that God can forget; that the men and women whose trust in God has been complete and unwavering, who, year in, year out, have lived as ever in God's sight, shall at the last be allowed to drop into dead nothingness, forgotten and forsaken of the God whom they trusted, is to come face to face with tragedy,—soul-slaying tragedy, — compared to which the tragedy that is concerned with the slaying of the body is scarce worthy a thought."

For a time there was silence. Then again the Angel spoke :

"There was once a man who was a dreamer. He was a child of Eternity, dreaming the dream of Time, and even while he dreamt, he was half-awake and knew that he was but dreaming. To others, a thought might be the very byword for all that is intangible and unreal. To him what they counted realities, were the only unrealities. Things and persons had no existence except in his thoughts of them, and had he opened his eyes one morning to find that this world, and the things and persons of

The Face Beyond the Door

this world, were gone for ever, he would but have sighed and said, 'At last, then, the awakening for which I have waited has come, and now I am asleep no longer.' .

"Not that he set thought above conduct. He held, and rightly, that he who, knowing that his own life, could it be seen of all, would give the lie to his words, is yet willing to make wares of righteousness by preaching it for pay from a pulpit, or by publishing it for sale in a book, is a sorrier knave than he whose business is the circulation of false coin, for whereas the one tampers with a currency that has been minted by man, the other debases the coinage which bears the image of God.

"Would'st thou 'think truly,' then 'live truly,' was the axiom of his life, and of those who thought truly, he would fain believe that the heart of them, at least, was set upon righteousness."

III

“THE lad held that God answers prayer. He was not so superstitious as to suppose that the All-Wise One will confuse the issues of a universe at a creature's bidding. Shall he, who sails east, ask the Lord of the Four Winds to speed his voyage by favouring gales, when haply one, who sails to the west, is praying for winds from the east? The lad knew well that God would not be God, did He not withhold the gift that is unwisely asked, the gift that we seek in a narrow and selfish spirit, the gift that can only be granted at cost of another's loss. But he knew, too, that the child, whose simple prayer is lisped, what time her little head is pillowed on her mother's knee, is less near to her earthly mother, than the man, the very thought of whose heart is a prayer, is

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near to the Father in Heaven ; and that, though God may deny the material gift for which we ask, that He may give us a spiritual gift of greater excellence, yet to those, who unfailingly rest in Him, will He as unfailingly give their heart's desire.

“The lad was a hero-worshipper. So supreme an influence for good were certain books ; so inseparably associated were they with all that is noblest in humanity ; so intensely did they make for righteousness and perfection, that he would not be persuaded that the writers of these books could rest content with anything which came short of such righteousness and such perfection as they pictured.

“Hero-worshipper though he might be, however, he was not so blind a worshipper as to fail to see that certain of his idols had feet of clay. That this singer was known to love the gaming-table, that artist the wine-cup, he would not attempt to deny, but his invariable answer was : ‘ So much the less singer, the less artist, he ! Wherein he sinned, therein

Beyond the Door

his art has suffered ; yet was there never true artist who in his heart of hearts did not realise and revere the beauty of holiness.'

"The man could not but so believe, for to him all art was but a thought in the mind of God.

"To the pseudo-artist and word-juggler, who assured him that the fact of a book being good or bad in its influence or its intention, has nothing to do with its value as a work of art ; that the book or picture must be judged by the fact whether it be well or ill-written, well or ill-painted, he would reply : ' You may say so, if you choose so to say, and you may, and with equal reason, say that the coming and going of the sun have nothing to do with the coming and going of day and night ; that day is day, and night, night, whether the sun cease to rise, or continue constant in the heavens. Your saying so will not alter eternal principles, and though one is far from desiring that art be self-consciously ethical, the fact remains that the highest art is unconsciously so, if only for the reason that the higher the art, the

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nearer it approximates to a pure thought of God.'

"In the presence, therefore, of great pictures or in the recital of brave deeds, in the hearing of high music, or of a true poem, at sight of the least of the flowers of the field—the soul of the man knelt, or stood instinctively at prayer.

"And each morning, when the white wonder of the dawn, bubbling up in the East, like water rising from a spring, to over-run meadow and glebe, and then swelling in volume, like an incoming tide upon a level beach, sending billows and rollers of light to wash clean the tainted atmosphere of the world, till the morning air was cool and sweet and crystalline as the sands which are left by a receding tide beneath the feet—each morning was to the man as newly wonderful as was the face of the risen Christ to those who watched by the sepulchre—each morning was a new resurrection from the dead ; a new and sacred promise of Immortality.

"In the drag of the day, in the heaviness of

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late noontide, when all nature is at lull, when strength slips away from the body, and thought stands still in the brain, the angel in the man seemed sometimes to lapse back into the animal, and, for the moment, the life of the senses enticed with invitation lovelier and more alluring than the life of the soul.

“But each evening, as he dreamed himself out into the sunset, all that was noble would reawaken.

“Though, since the world’s beginning, there have never been two sunsets alike, yet in each sunset found he ever that which was anciently familiar—that which set such strange stirrings in his veins, as might stir in the veins of those who, born of the same father and mother, look each upon the other’s face, not knowing that they are of one blood.

“It was so that the sunset seemed to call him, and it was so that the soul of him went out to claim kinship with the sunset.

“At the little old church, where he had worshipped in the morning of his days, it had been the custom, during prayer, for the

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congregation reverently to kneel, while some, who were stricken in years, as reverently stood. *And to him when, at eventide, all* Nature was at her orisons, the petals of the flowers seemed like little hands folded in prayer, while the great trees—those grey-beards of meadow and garden—stood, like the aged worshippers in the church, in sacred and silent commune with God.

“And, indeed to the man it seemed as if not only all Nature were at worship, but as if the great world itself had become, as it were, a little child of worlds among the worlds of wise old stars. For at hush of even, the world itself seemed kneeling; On the world’s lips was silence, yet to the listening man, that silence was a prayer. Not now the morning prayer that asks material blessing, but the eventide prayer of pure and adoring worship; not the prayer of many words, but the prayer so fervent that its words are few. ‘Our Father, which art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy Name. Amen.’ These were the words into which the prayer on the world’s lips

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seemed to frame itself; and, as the kneeling worshippers repeat, after the minister, *the words with which he leads them in prayer*, so from the lips of the man the same words fell. And in his heart was peace.

“To him, at such moments, it seemed as if the lost Garden of Eden lay now beyond the setting sun. It was the Presence of God walking therein in the cool of the day, to hold commune with His creatures, which gave such glory and glamour to those sky-gardens of the west. Then would the man point up to the sunset, crying out, ‘Dear God, all that the soul of me loves, all that I seem to have lost—my boyhood’s hopes, my manhood’s strivings, my love-dreams, my little angel child—they are not really lost. They are *there, there*, with Thee, among the crimson and purple and gold. The evil—that which is not of God—dies, but all that is good, lives on for evermore.”

The Angel paused. Then continuing he said :

“You who make mock of the dreams of youth; you to whom the comfort of the body

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is of more moment than the life of the soul ; who hold that ‘ there are no such men as we fable,’ that it matters not whether a book or picture be good or evil, so long as it be ‘ art ’ ; to whom death is the end of all, the Christ but a man, and God little more than the Maker of a vast system of machinery, from which, having once set it a-going, He turns away, heedless whether the world, like some huge wheel, crush underneath or carry upwards with it, in its revolution, the pigmy creatures with whom He has peopled it—answer me, do you know this man of whom I have told you? Behold now I show you his face. Look well thereon and make avowal whether it be familiar or strange.”

And with a cry the man made answer :

“ I know it. ’Tis the face of the man who once was, but now is not. The face of the man God meant me to be.”

IV

“WHY did you not become that man?” said the Angel sternly.

“Ask the God who took my boyhood’s faith from me,” cried the man passionately. “God knows I did not want to lose faith. But can one control the thoughts that come and go in the brain?”

“Once you believed in the life to come,” said the Angel, “but now you believe therein no longer, and for this your loss of faith you make a grievance against God—a grievance even against your fellow-creatures, whining to them in abject and impotent self-pity, because Death waits for you, and you fear Him. And when they make not haste to cast from their own shoulders upon yours the mantle of their

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pity, you rail against the unsympathetic selfishness of man.

“Why should your fellow-creatures bestow upon you the alms of their pity, seeing that they are subject to a like fate to yours? Is life less sweet to them than to you? Or shall they suffer one pang less than you in that last awful giving up of the ghost which all mortals dread? 'Tis not the pity of God or of man that you need, but searching and relentless self-examination.

“Faith is to the soul what health is to the body. 'Tis unnatural to disbelieve. Doubt is too often the first symptom of a sick soul—the danger-signal giving warning that all is not well with the soul, just as fainting and nausea give warning that mischief is at work with the body.

“And to the sick in soul, as to the sick in body, the first question of the physician must be, ‘What of your life? Are you living it for evil or for good?’”

The Angel paused as one who awaits an answer.

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But with sullen face and averted eyes the man sat huddling with outstretched palms over the dead fire, and answer came there none save the shamed answer of his silence.

V

“Do you believe in God?” asked the Angel at last.

“I do!” said the man. “That belief not all the discoveries of science have shaken, can ever shake. No one shall persuade me that this wonderful body of ours—to take only one wonderful thing in all this universe of wonders—organs doing our bidding, unbidden and automatically, whether we sleep or wake; hands that open and shut without the exertion of conscious will-power, as if in anticipation of our lightest wish, and with finger-tips, of which no two are alike in all the many million millions of human beings in the world; eyes that even as they look can signal to the brain a score of colours in as many flowers, that can read in other eyes the secret thought of other

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souls, or at a glance can cross and compass the space between this world and the farthest star ; to say nothing of the brain which conceives, the soul that cries after, and is akin to, God—no man, I say, can persuade me that all this arose originally (just as fire arises out of the striking together of flints) from what has been termed a ‘fortuitous concourse of atoms.’

“It seems to me that those who cease to believe that this world, with its punctual alternation of day and night, and unerring return of Spring (that rainbow of the seasons, which comes, after winter storm and snow, to assure us of the faithfulness of God, and shines across the troubled face of a rainy sky, like laughter in a child’s eyes while still the tears are wet upon the little cheeks)—it seems to me that those who can attribute all this, as well as the miracle of child-birth, to blind happening of chance, rather than to the design of an Omnipotent Creator, should be the last to hurl at others the reproach of ‘superstition’ and ‘credulity.’ It is we, not they, who are ‘sceptics.’ Compared with such a theory of

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life as theirs, our reasonable belief is but to make a mouthful of a gnat, while they, in their credulity, swallow entire camels.

“ Even could they prove that this world is, as they say, the outcome of ‘a concourse of atoms,’ my faith would remain unshaken. Resolve me this world back into a single primordial atom, resolve me a man into an ape, and the ape back to an amœba, and my belief in God, my wonder and worship, are greater than had He seen fit to call man and ape and amœba into being at a word.

“ Men speak to-day of science being antagonistic to religion. They speak as if that theory of life which they call Evolution were a contradiction instead of a confirmation of belief.

“ If anything can restore my lost faith in Immortality, it is this same doctrine of Evolution—or truth of Evolution as I hold it to be. The very Scriptures, at which the unbelieving scoff, trace the rise of our race, upward from the dust, to the human in Adam, and from the human to the Divine in Christ. It is unscien-

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tific, it is a flat contradiction of Evolution, to believe that out of one type shall evolve another and a higher, and out of that higher type shall evolve one higher still, and so on, and on, through countless upward stages and ages—only to hold that death breaks the continuity by ending all.

“It has been said that if man were once an ape, is not that the greater reason why one day he should become an angel? Unbeliever in Immortality as I am, there are moments when old faiths revive, even as to the sincerest believer there are moments when faith falters. Inconsistent it may be, on the part both of the believer and the unbeliever, but to be inconsistent is only to be human; and at such moments I tell myself that if Evolution be indeed the Fingerpost of Science, it is heavenward and Godward that Evolution's finger points. Science is the truth of the natural world, just as religion is the science of the spiritual world. The one is built up atom by atom by the brain: the other already is, but may be seen only by the eye of the soul. The one is a

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lighthouse to warn the mariner off the rocks ; the other is the star in the sky, by which he steers. When our knowledge of the natural world is equal to our knowledge of the spiritual world, then will Science and Religion shine forth in perfect and beautiful accord."

VI

THE man paused with eyes aglow, and looking at him curiously, the Angel said :

“ Believe you all this, and yet deny Immortality ? ”

“ Listen,” replied the man.

“ That God concerns Himself about the welfare of the world, about the welfare of the race, I make no doubt ; but that He concerns Himself to consider separately the welfare of each individual member of that race, I have ceased to believe. God’s plans for the future of this world, this universe, no man may know. Even as a teacher wipes away from a black-board the chalked words or figures with which he has proved a proposition or worked a sum, so from the face of the heavens God may see fit, ere to-morrow’s morn, to wipe away, like

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vain scribbling, His handwriting of constellations, comets, moons, planets, nebulae, and Milky Way. The time may come—I believe will come—when, suddenly by fire, or slowly by cold, He will make of this earth of ours a moon to shine coldly by night, or a sun to warm by day another world than ours.

“Even should He will that the human race and this world continue, the fact remains that though humanity may be, and perhaps is, immortal—immortal the individual man is not, save only so far as something of himself shall survive in the children of his body or of his brain. In the children he has begotten, the work he has done, or in the words he has written, some essence of himself shall yet be found after the body of him has ceased to quiver with ecstasy or pain, the heart to beat, the brain to think. ‘Man is immortal till his work be done.’ Like the coral zoophyte that comes into being and lives and dies that it may contribute its tiny shell to the building of the central reef, so we human beings play our infinitesimal part. And having provided for

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the carrying on of God's scheme by obeying the instincts of reproduction, that others may come after us to carry on the work which we have continued or begun—then like the coral zoophytes we die and cease to be, as little regarded and remembered of God as they.

“Yet man, the egomaniac of created beings, has presumptuously dared to claim for himself that which is the attribute only of God. It is arrogance, gross and colossal, for me to suppose that my little *ego* is of sufficient importance to continue to exist after I have lived out the brief life which God has granted me here.

“Who am I to claim for myself an eternal place in the eternal scheme? This world, that scheme, existed before I was, and will continue to exist when I have ceased to be.”

VII

THEN said the Angel :

“You have called yourself inconsistent, and inconsistent you assuredly are. First, you profess your belief that God is all-powerful, and in the next breath you speak as if you set limits to God’s power. To create, to call into existence a creature, to breathe therein that very essence and spark of God at which men and angels must never cease to wonder, but never can *explain*—that something which is called ‘life’—is surely more incredible, more inconceivable, than that a living creature, having once come into being, should never more cease to be. In all the world, all the universe, life, and life only, is divine. All else—planets and suns and stars—are but dead matter ; and the animalcule which the

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microscope makes visible in a drop of water is more marvellous than they. If one thing, and one thing only, be certain, it is that only out of life does life come. And all life, could we trace it to its source, leads back to God. The science of to-day may trace life's stages from man to the ape, and from the ape backwards through countless forms to the amœba, but sooner or later the science of to-day comes to a dead stop. It is not what science has found out, but what she has not found out that completes the chain. Every century sees science place the origin of life farther back. Before science had learnt to make use of the microscope, the animalcule in the water *was*, though man knew not of that animalcule's existence. A hundred years hence, man may learn to make use of some other new mechanism, compared to which, your microscope of to-day is but a schoolboy's toy—a mechanism which may reveal forms of life so minute that, in comparison with them, the animalcule in the water shall seem a very monster. But what the science of to-day, or

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of a thousand æons from to-day, cannot, and never will be, able to explain away, is life. We may label it by this or that name, and, seeing it so labeled, foolish men and women may be content to call it by that name and to cease to wonder, just as they cease to wonder, many of them, at the miracles by which a child, a sparrow, or a flower is born. But in all the world, life, and life only, is divine, for life comes from life, and all life leads back to God.

“Answer me. Do you doubt that the God, who called life into being, has it in His power, if He so choose, to continue to man the life which God Himself has begun?”

“I do not doubt it,” replied the man.

Then said the Angel: “You doubt neither the existence nor the power of God, but if there be a God, as you believe, surely you must admit that God to be good. Savages may conceive a Supreme Power who is evil; civilised men and women, never. And would a good God call into being men and women and little children, implanting imperishably in their hearts the belief in, and the craving for,

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immortality—setting in those hearts a love towards each other which is surely immortal since it is the nature of God Himself—only to make mock of them at last by robbing them alike of life and love and immortality? Would you be content to let your little child, and your tender thought for that child, all the infinite father-love of your heart, pass out of your life for ever? Yet you stand to your child precisely as God stands to you, with this difference—that the sum of all the father-love, all the mother-love of the world, boundless as that love may be, is not equal to the love of God for any one of His creatures. To compare your love to His love, is to set a single sun ray against the gleaming father-sun whence all light comes—to liken a drop of water to the mother of all waters—the sea.

“Other loves may not be all unselfish, all unsoiled of the flesh, but the ecstasy, with which a mother hugs and gathers her child to her heart, is the one pure passion, the white flame of which casts no shadow, since, like God’s love, it seeks only to give.

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“Just as a gardener sets seeds in the soil to lie dormant for a time, and then to spring up and bloom in due season, so when God made men and women, He set the seed of immortality in their souls, knowing that motherhood and fatherhood would call it into flower. Nay, I go farther than this, and say that, were there no promise of a hereafter in the Scriptures, had Christ never come, and were there no word of immortality in all the natural and spiritual world—I am persuaded that belief in immortality is a flower which would have sprung, self-seeded, in the garden of a mother’s heart. I am persuaded, even that had God *not* planned immortality for His creatures, He would not be the God He is, could He look upon human life, human love, and most of all upon the love of father and mother for their child, and refuse to grant to them and to their child, the immortality for which they crave.

“A little maid once said that she knew there was a heaven because of the presence of flowers on earth. Her mother, she said, had shown her dandelion-down afloat upon the

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wind, and had told her it was thus that the first flowers had come, wind-seeded from heaven.

“’Twas but a pretty fable to take the fancy of a child, but it is a fable which has a meaning for God’s children of older growth.

“The presence of beauty on the earth is surely a witness to the love of Him who is Eternal Loveliness. Tell me that Nature bestows those colours upon the flower to attract the bee, that this effect comes of Evolution, that of Natural Selection, and I shall not say you nay, for Nature *does*, indeed, seem to evolve out of herself that which she requires for her own purposes and for the maintenance of life. But it was God, the Eternal Loveliness, who tinted that sunset sky, who gave those changing colours to the sea, who made the rainbow—that flower of the sky which blooms and withers betwixt sunshine and a shower—an arch of living, luminous opal and pearl.

“Has art, which men miscall long—art, which is not long, but eternal—no inner

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meaning to your eye? Has music no message for your ear?—music, of which one of the great of the earth once said, ‘Away! Away! thou speakest to me of things which in all this life I have not found, and in this life shall never find’; music which is surely angel-speech heard of mortal, but as yet untranslatable to mortal ear; music which is none other than the sound of the deep waters of Eternity breaking on the shallow shores of Time?”

VIII

AGAIN the Angel spoke :

“You say that you have ceased to believe in Eternal Life. It seems to me that the falling from faith of you, and such as you, goes farther back, and that you have ceased to believe in Him who is Eternal Life—that what is at fault is not so much your faith in immortality as your faith in God.”

“It is God’s care for the individual of which I seek to be assured,” repeated the man. “The question whether I have failed, or have not failed in faith, matters nothing in comparison with the question whether God the Creator has called into being a creature—no matter whether that creature be man or mouse, horse or bird, dog or ant—only to leave that creature, like a fatherless,

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motherless foundling cast out upon the street, to starve or to be fed, to live in comfort, or to perish miserably as the cruel chance may be. Even earthly parents may not so repudiate their responsibilities. Mothers have faced death a thousand times for the sake of their child. The very bird in the hedge will yield up its little life in defence of its brood. Yet we, God's children—whether of the human race or of the dumb creation—come into this world, only to be left to the tender mercies of the cruellest of all foster-mothers, Dame Chance.

“Last summer, as I walked in my garden, I heard a fledgling sparrow chirruping merrily under a bush. Possibly he had by accident dropped out of his nest, and, by making parachutes of his wings, had so broken his fall as to reach ground without taking hurt, and was now in a flutter, between pride and fear, at his own daring. For a few minutes I watched him ruffling it as roguishly as a robin, now cocking his glossy head at a sprawling worm, now stropping his tiny beak,

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razor-wise, upon a twig, and twittering lustily meanwhile for very joy of his freedom and of his merry youth and of the summer morning. •

“ But, alas ! as into the First Garden there stole and slid the serpent, so, into our later gardens, a fanged and spitting creature, of like cruelty, crouches and watches, with belly to the ground, to spring upon its prey ; and lest my small sparrow, so merrily at matins under a bush, should find some prowling cat to play at clerk by saying Amen to his matins and thereafter making an end of them, and of him, I chased the feather-surpliced chorister into a corner, and in spite of the valorous onslaught of his beak, set him high up upon a cedar bough. Whether the fact of my placing him there led him to suspect some trap or ambush from which he must make haste to escape, or whether it was sheer flurry and fright which brought him to the ground, I cannot say, but scarcely was my back turned, before again he had taken cover under the bush. Again I caught him,

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setting him, this time, high on an ivied window-ledge where cat could neither climb nor leap; and yet again he came to ground. When I had a third time set him out of reach of danger, and he had a third time as resolutely come back to it, I thwarted the small malcontent no longer, but returning to my hammock, I insinuated myself therein and with my fingers between the pages of a book, lay a-swing in the sunshine as in the centre of a golden globe. For a time I forgot both book and bird. Then suddenly my golden globe shattered into darkness at a sound—a mere thimbleful of sound—a scream of terror and agony, so tiny and yet so haunting and so horrible, that I seem to hear it even now.

“A tame rook, that has the run of my garden, had pinned the sparrow, breast upward, under his talons, and, as I looked, was stabbing the life out of him with iron beak. For the wee bird no happy warbling among the leaves; no happier rearing of his young. It seemed to me as if he had been robbed of

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his right to live, and though it is but what happens somewhere every hour—perhaps every minute—of each summer day, the sight of that helpless nestling, done to death in the June sunshine, and by one of his feathered kin, turned me sick and faint with horror. 'Twas murder, bloody and cruel, and in thought I could not forgive the God who had made a world upon such a plan."

Then said the Angel:

"You know no more of God's purpose than that sparrow knew of yours. To the fluttering nestling, well nigh panting out his tiny life in terror, you seemed some cruel monster, hunting him down to kill, whereas your thought was but to place him beyond reach of danger. And you lost patience with the little creature that, haply, God had committed to your care. Thrice only did you succour him and then, manlike, left him to his fate, and now would throw upon God the blame for the death which you countenanced.

"Had God dealt with you as you dealt with God's bird; had God not borne with

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you, not thrice, but thrice three thousand times, where had you been to-day? And if God saw fit to set that little creature singing in the green groves of Paradise (and who dare say that God has no place in His universe for the sparrow, that God Himself has told us is evermore within His care!); if God saw fit at the cost of a moment's pain to take His bird—happier than ever for the knowledge of danger for ever past—where danger shall menace never more, what is that to you?"

"It may be that you are right," answered the man. "It may be that for the wings which could not carry the bird beyond reach of the danger which lurks in an earthly garden, God gave that little creature wings which could bear him afar to the garden of God. From a harp or violin, which is out of tune, comes not music but discord. It may be that even as a musician screws tighter and tighter each separate string, till the whole instrument be in harmony, so the racking of nerves which we call pain may be no more

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than the touch of God's hand, tuning the strings of men's souls to sweet accord, that out of discord shall come harmony, out of brief suffering shall come eternal bliss!

“ But listen !

“ I had a friend whom I loved more dearly than a brother—the truest, gentlest, most stainless, and unselfish of gentlemen. For many years he and I, and two other close friends and cronies, constantly met and walked and talked or sat at table together. He was a frequent visitor at my house, and occasionally would accompany me to the homes of the other two members of our circle ; but none of us was ever asked to his. Naturally we made no comment upon this, either to him or to each other. If among friends we must remain silent about matters which are told us in confidence, it is even more sternly imperative that we remain silent in regard to matters concerning which confidence is withheld.

“ One day (I shall never forget it) he opened his heart to us.

“ ‘ You must have wondered to yourselves,’

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he said, 'why it was that I have never asked any of you to my home. I had hoped to have gone to my grave without speaking, but now my hands are forced. For eighteen years my wife has been a drunkard. Now, God help me! she has gone, as women who drink, too often, do, from drink to worse—if anything *can* be worse in a woman than the systematic bestialisation of herself by drink. But she has gone, as I say, from drink to worse, and for the sake of my daughters, who are just growing into womanhood, I am compelled to divorce her. Up to now no word of this has ever passed my lips. On the contrary, I have lied consistently and deliberately, that others might be led to believe, as you have been led to believe, that my home was happy and that she was the best of mothers and wives. Of that lie I am unashamed, for it was not an untruth of the heart.—Had I for any reason, or for no reason, to face the scaffold, God knows that, God helping me, I would climb that scaffold with tripping step and smiling lips, rather than that any emotion of mine should

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give zest and edge to the gossip of the *canaille* over their cups. Think, then, what it meant to a man of my pride to know his wife, the bearer of his name, the mother of his children, for a shameless drunkard! You have wondered sometimes that one, who is still comparatively young, should be thus prematurely aged. You have wondered that my hair is grey and thin, that my nerves are shattered, my body feeble and bowed, and that I speak with embittered spirit and barbed tongue. Had you grown to hate God's very sunlight, as I have, because, in the sweet but searching light of the sun, the secret of my shame and of her sin was more apparent than by night—your wonder would cease.

“‘At night the unsteady step, the bottle slipped under a cloak, and brought from that depôt of the devil whither she had gone, ostensibly, to purchase groceries, but in reality to take away gin—these might escape a neighbour's eye. With the fellow who sold it to her the secret was like to be safe. Scandal of another sort might be whispered across a

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counter or over teacups. It could do no more than stab at a woman's reputation, a man's honour, but business secrets—since they affect the takings of the till—must among men of business be held sacred. The firm of Satan & Co. has its agents in high as well as in humble places, and has touts of all sorts, saints and shopmen, statesmen and sinners, at work extending its ancient trade, but at few establishments is so roaring a business driven, as at those Ticket Offices for Hell where a husband's earnings are supposed to be spent in groceries, but in reality are squandered in brandy, whisky, or gin!

“ ‘I had hoped, as I say, to have kept my hideous secret to myself, but now, alas! secrecy is no longer possible. Recently I was compelled to remain the whole of the night by the bedside of a patient for whose life I was fighting hand to hand with death. Next morning at five, as the crisis was past, and the patient sleeping, I crept home in the grey of the dawn that I might snatch a few hours' rest before commencing the work of another day,—

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only to find that my wife had availed herself of my absence to get drunk, and while in that condition had admitted into my house, under the very roof where her young daughters were sleeping, a villain with whom I now learn she has long been carrying on an intrigue. Upon the man, feeble as I am, I have put a mark which, please God, he shall carry to his dying day. It is a mark seeing which all shall say, "That disfigurement was done to a villain and a blackguard by the man whom he had foully wronged."

"The woman, for her children's sake, I spared—but to small purpose. She was placed under lock and key, but a fox is not more cunning than a dipsomaniac under the craving for drink. She contrived in some way to escape, and being found drunk in the streets, was taken to the station. I made strenuous efforts to keep the case from coming before a magistrate, and so appearing in the papers, but she was equally set on courting scandal. She saw in this public washing of dirty linen a means to injure, perhaps to ruin me. People

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hesitate to call in a doctor who cannot order his own house decently, or who comes, perhaps to a critical case, with harassed mind and nerves unstrung. There is no madness so cruel as the madness which is born of a woman's lust of drink. To injure the very man whom she has most cause to love, the man who is fighting for her soul with the devil, and to save her from herself, she is ready to involve him, herself, and her children in one common ruin. The prostitute on the street is less shameless; the suicide is less reckless than the woman who has drowned in drink the angel which God sets in the bosom of every woman. Men may, and do, soak away their manhood. It is hateful, it is hideous that they should do so, but when the angel in a woman dies, the angel's place is taken by a devil from Hell.

“The rest is soon told. There was a terrible scene in court, the unhappy woman shouting my name hysterically to the reporters that everybody should know, as she said, whose wife she was. She accused me of

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being a man of drunken habits as well as an unfaithful husband, and when the magistrate said he could not listen to her, she refused to leave the court, and had to be removed forcibly, screaming out shamelessly, as she went, the story of her unfaithfulness, and declaring that it was my wickedness which had driven her to it.

“ ‘That is what drink can do to one who had once been a pure woman, a good wife, and a loving mother.’ ”

IX

THE man paused in his story, and when he spoke again, his words were like a challenge thrown in the face of the listening Angel.

“The friend of whom I have told you is dead. His heart was broken. The woman who was once his wife still lives, but of the vileness of the life she leads I may not speak.

“I passed her in the street to-day, and the face of her was so shameless, so bestialised by vice and drink, that I searched in vain for a sign, not only of her Divine origin, but of her womanhood, of her very humanity.

“It may be that, even on earth, pain and suffering have some ultimate outcome in good. But out of the bestialisation of a soul, it is surely impossible, even to God, that good can come ; and that God could bring into the world

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an immortal soul, most of all a woman, fore-knowing that she would sink to such an abyss of degradation,—that God could do this, makes me sometimes feel that rather than believe in such a God, one does God honour by refusing to believe in a God at all."

As the man's voice ceased, it seemed as if he slept within his sleep, as if he dreamed within his dream; from which sleep, from which dream, he presently awakened, crying out: "I have seen a vision."

"What saw you therein?" inquired the Angel.

"I saw in my dream the place to which pass the souls of them who in life have been slaves of strong drink. I had thought to see some manner of prison-house, Hades or Purgatory, yet to me it seemed less like a place of punishment than of healing for the sick of body and of soul. It seemed indeed as if nowhere else in the universe was the expense of God's pity so tender and so infinite as in this place, where I saw faces degraded out of all human likeness by debauchery and drink. I remember that in

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some strange way the dwellers therein were aware of, and were witnessing, the daily life of the woman of whom I have been speaking, the woman whom I passed this day in the street, the woman who was once the loved and honoured wife of my dead friend. They saw her staggering, sottishly drunk, in the streets; they saw her strike brutally at her child when the little one cried out wanly, weakly, for bread; they saw her bartering soul and body alike in an infamous traffic for the blood-money wherewith to buy more drink.

“Whether I were in that prison-house for long years, as indeed it seemed to me then, or but for a moment, as I now suppose it must have been, I cannot say, but I know that in presence of the terrible object-lesson of that woman’s life, which they were compelled thus, in their own despite, to witness, some sense, some realisation, of its loathsomeness, seemed to awake, even on the faces of the most degraded.

“Slowly, subtly, I saw the stubbornness, the shamelessness, of those drink-debauched faces

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soften into some semblance of humanity, of womanhood.

“In the eyes of one poor creature, witnessing thus the sinnings of her sister woman, I saw loathing and horror grow. ‘God of Pity, have mercy upon me!’ she cried in agony, and, as the words left her lips, I heard a sound like the thankful sigh of listening angels. And when yet another woman, witnessing her earth-sister’s shame, cried out in even more terrible agony of soul, ‘God of Pity, have mercy upon *her*!’ there came the sudden happy harping of saints in Heaven; and she who had so spoken, her face strangely beautiful, passed out of that place, and I saw her no more.

“Then, looking back upon earth, I beheld death come swiftly, mercifully, to the sinning woman; and it seemed to me, ere the vision passed, that her soul was winging its way to the same place of repentance.”

The man ceased, and for a season he was silent. When again he spoke, his voice was passionate, yet pleading.

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"Was this all a dream, born of sad memories?" he asked, "or is there, beyond the grave, some such prison-house as that I visioned?"

And very gently the Angel made answer :

"The veil which hides the mysteries of the spirit world may not for mortal be withdrawn. May it not be, however, that these things are a parable ; and that what you have seen is God's word to you, that you may pause ere yet again you say that, even to God, it is impossible that, out of the degradation of God's creature, good may come?"

X

WHEN next the man spoke there was a new note of hope in his voice, and from his face something of the heaviness of his doubt had passed.

"Is there aught else that still troubles you?" asked the Angel.

"Only this," said the man. "They, who should know better than I, would persuade me that to modern science it is possible to associate this or that attribute of a man with this or that portion of his brain. Here, they say, in this particular cranny, are located the grey cells whence man's moral sense comes; here is yet another centre which is responsible for his perception of what is beautiful in art. Injure or destroy, by accident or design, this set of brain cells, and

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the man's moral sense is correspondingly either injured or destroyed. Destroy or do injury to the parts where are performed the processes by which he writes poems, paints pictures, or composes music, and a like result will follow a like cause. The brain, they say, secretes thought, as the liver secretes bile, and out of that thought grew the conception of a soul. But the soul, they would persuade me, is nothing more than a higher manifestation of the brain, and, like the brain—since both are material—may and must be destroyed.

“If this be true, if the researches of science have incontrovertibly proved that brain and soul are one and the same, then man's dream of a soul, which survives the dissolution of the body, beautiful as that dream may be, is gone for ever.”

“Do you believe that you have an immortal soul?” inquired the Angel.

“There was a time when I did so believe,” replied the man, “and there are times when I am not far from so believing now, but more

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often than not I look back on that belief as one of the lost illusions of youth."

And the Angel made answer :

" If the Devil were in need of a lie to serve some evil purpose, he would look for it, not among the recorded words of those whom the Churches have excommunicated and denounced as antichrists and deceivers. Rather would he choose to make search among the musty-fusty collection of so-called truths which—hallowed by universal acceptance and the dust of centuries—lie pigeon-holed away as self-evident, self-proved and unassailable. Of all these ancient and lying adages, the Devil finds no such tool for his purpose as that which would have men to believe that youth with its dreamings is foolish, and age with its disillusionment, wise ; for as has been said, ' There shall come a time when man shall awaken from his lofty dreams to find—his dreams still there, and that nothing has gone but his sleep.'

" Tell me, do you remember your mother and the manner of her passing ? "

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"I remember," answered the man.

"Describe to me that passing," said the Angel.

"It was from peritonitis, and the agony was so terrible that the doctors mercifully kept her under opium, up to the moment of her passing. I shall not soon forget that passing. The drug had been administered at frequent intervals, and in such large doses that if the brain and the soul be one, and subject therefore to the laws of matter,—then must the very soul and brain of her have been paralysed and put out of all action by the opium. Under its influence the face was scarcely recognisable, for of the eyes—wide open as the eyelids were—only the whites seemed visible, and she lay with every sense so drugged and drowned that a log had scarcely been less capable of a conscious thought.

"Suddenly, in an instant, there was a marvellous, a miraculous change. I say a 'change,' yet none of us saw any change take place. It was but that the other face had gone, and that in its stead there looked out

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at us the beautiful saint-face of one of the holiest and most Christ-like of women. And never had those eyes looked at her husband and at her children with more conscious love than then. And on that face was a light which I may not describe, since not in all the wonderful world is there aught to which it may be likened. But, seeing that light, we who stood in the darkened room, hand clasped in hand around the bed, felt for a moment as if we were in the very Presence of God. And with that light on her face, and with such look of infinite and tender love in her eyes as I shall never see in human eyes again, she died."

"Whence came the light, whence came that look of conscious love?" asked the Angel. "If the soul and the brain be one, then from your own showing the brain of her was so drugged and drowned in opium that a log, as you have said, had been scarcely more incapable of conscious thought."

And steadfastly the man made answer, "I believe that what I saw was the passing of a pure and saintly soul to God."

XI

SUDDENLY the man stirred in his sleep. Christmas had come and gone, for the clocks were striking twelve, and soon upon the midnight clear came the carillon of cathedral bells chiming a hymn:

Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come ;
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.

“Do you know that hymn?” said the Angel softly. “It is the very anthem of eternity. Though but two hundred years old as it now stands, it seems ancient as humanity. It is easy to believe that, far back in the morning of the world, when man was first groping after God, was first stretching feeble hands into the

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dark, if haply somewhere amid the darkness he might find the hand of the unknown, unseen Father—it is easy to believe, I say, even thus early in the history of the race, that the cry of the creature, after the Creator, would shape itself into some such words as these. It sweeps the whole gamut of the ages. It is as true to you, to-day, as it was to your fathers, and it was as true to your fathers' fathers, as it was to the far back progenitors from whose loins the race first sprang. And when you have become of no more moment in this world than the specks of dust which are whirled by, on the winds of a winter, that is dead and gone,—that hymn will be as true to your children, and to your children's children, as it is to the anxious, timid, yet trusting hearts of to-day.

“It is more than the anthem of eternity to which I have likened it. It is a pledge and promise of Immortality. •

“Whether some atom of the dust of Moses, on whose words the hymn was founded, be blown hither and thither on some sandy Palestinian plain, is neither mine nor yours

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to know, but that the thought, which first called the words of the hymn to the lips of Moses, is alive to-day, millions can bear witness. And shall the thought be looked for among the quick, and the Soul, that gave birth to that thought, be looked for among the dead? As well believe that man, the creature—man who was once but a thought in the mind of God—shall survive to see his Creator perish."

XII

AGAIN the man slept and dreamed.

In his dream he saw a walled Eastern city, the four-square houses of which, low-domed as the clay-built kraal of the beaver, clustered (like meadow-mushrooms upspringing amid fallen rocks) around columned temples, palaces, and towers. • Overhead the sun burned in a sky so blue, that temples, towers, palaces, and the rounded roofs under which the populace was thick-hived, gleamed like washed marble, or whitened in the glare, like linen which housewives spread to bleach upon the grass.

And in the chief street of the city a turbulent mob of men, women, and children, some unclean of person, and clad in ragged gaberdines, filthy as the garbage that festered in the street

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corners; others spruce, turbaned and richly robed, pressed howling and hooting where a solitary prisoner strode between two files of soldiery.

One knew by the bound wrists that He was a prisoner, else by His royal bearing, the majesty of His brow, and the native grace and dignity with which He moved, one had thought Him to be some great monarch moving to the judgment throne amid massed and acclaiming multitudes.

Looking at that advancing Figure, tall as the tallest of the picked Roman guards, erect, spare, soldier-like, noting the superb poise of the head upon the shoulders, the strength and stateliness of the stride, one ceased to wonder why it was that half a score of grown men, greedy of gain, and made bold by avarice, had incontinently left their overturned money-tables, and fled panic-stricken from the Temple, rather than face a whip of small cords in the hand of a single man.

Remembering that He was of gentle birth and noble lineage, remembering that the blood

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of kings ran in His veins, one might have thought it was contempt for the rabble, yelping beside and behind Him, which lent such "lift" and aloofness to the nobly-formed head.

• But as one so thought, one remembered too that it was from the very poor His disciples had been chosen, and that He had elected to be despised as a Nazarene and the friend of publicans and sinners. Remembering, too, that He had made choice of the carpenter's bench, at which to work, beholding the infinite humility, the boundless compassion which softened the awful fire of those sin-accusing eyes, the onlooker realised that here was One to whom the very scum, the outcast, the fallen, and the lost, of His fellow-creatures must be sacred; One who even for the vile must entertain compassion, but never, even for the vilest of the vile, contempt.

One's first thought at sight of that Figure was a thought of sheer joy—the supreme and sunny joy with which the heart of a happy child suddenly over-wells—the joy of June mornings when all the world is made anew;

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when we waken to see, through the open casement, Summer, who has been up before us, go singing on her way with an armful of flowers; and when there is never a moment that the air around us is not a-ripple with bird-song, or with the shaken silver bells of baby-laughter or child-speech.

Looking at that advancing Figure, all Life's fetters seemed suddenly to fall away, all Life's flowers seemed suddenly to burst into blossom. Now, at last, and for the first time, could it be realised that man was indeed made in the likeness of God, for into this imperfect world had come One who, though of like flesh and blood to ours, was perfect and pure and beautiful, alike in body and in spirit; and, at sight of this perfect and beautiful work of God, the heart of humanity could not but sing in sheer joy, for now at last might humanity tower to perfection, now might flesh and blood spire into spirit.

Yet, as one drew near and beheld the awful sorrow of that face, the joy that sang in one's heart quivered suddenly into a stabbing

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dagger, for from those eyes looked out all the sorrow of all the world. One endured moment of such sorrow, as lay behind those eyes, had slain the man who was no more than man. Only God could endure such sorrow and live!

To say that in realising that upon this single soul was laid the burden, and was laid the blame, of all the sin and sorrow of the world, and that in realising this fact one realised also that He was a willing bearer of the burden, is but imperfectly to express the thought which the sight of that Figure aroused in one's mind, since "willing" implies consent, rather than choice, submission rather than command, whereas of that Figure every onlooker felt instinctively that here was one to compel, not to acknowledge, allegiance; one who obeyed no dictate save the dictate of His own soul, and, in obeying His own soul, served and yet ruled by right Divine.

In the same sense, notwithstanding that He walked with bound wrist, one felt it was He who held His captors captive; not they, Him.

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of the disturbance, the crowd, fearful of the soldiery, fell back. A woman of the streets, her baby at her breast, was dancing wantonly, and at each lewd gesture the ribald onlookers jeered and cheered anew. As the Christ passed the woman, He turned to look sorrowfully upon her, and on meeting the challenging purity of His eyes, she reeled as one reels at the lightning flash, and then sank with bowed head upon her knees, crying out, "Unclean! Unclean! Lord of all Holiness, speak but the word and I shall be pure!"

Whereat an evil-faced priest spurned her with his foot as she knelt, so that she and her child fell to the ground. And at that sight there blazed from the eyes of the Christ such fire of divine wrath—as with fists tight clenched He strained against His bonds that He might strike the miscreant to the ground—that even the rude soldiery of Rome, meeting that glance, quailed and fell away from where He stood.

Then to the dreaming man the scene of his dream shifted.

Night had come—and fitly, for even then

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was being done the deed on which Nature herself, shuddering and horror-stricken, had refused to look ; the darkest and most awful deed in the world's history—the Sin of sins, the Crime of crimes, the murder by the men and women, whom He came on earth to save, of humanity's Maker and God.

Yes, night had come, though it was but the sixth hour of the day, yet never before had such night made strange the earth, made fearful the heavens. With the night had come darkness—not the merciful darkness that fast-closes the shutters of sleep, that steals over the tired brain and lulls the tired body to rest ; not the darkness that hides away the hovels of earth and makes manifest the glittering star-ramparts which fortress the palaces of heaven ; but a hideous, haunting, semi-darkness, like the twilight of Hell—a darkness that was not all dark, but was pregnant with horror and with the menace of unimaginable evil.

As if from some smiling face the flesh had suddenly fallen, laying bare the grinning bone beneath, so from the face of the sky the light

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had faded, and where, but a moment before, the sun had been—empty darkness gaped as from the eyeless sockets of a skull. Yet over the face of the earth, rising like some miasmic exhalation, there came and went, uncertainly, strange phosphorescent lights—the outcome, it may be, of smouldering subterranean fires within—now, and for the first time, become visible because of the darkness; a light which made more unearthly the most awful scene which mortal eye has witnessed.

For a moment the earth and the darkness which had closed around it seemed to sway together like interlocked wrestlers come to the death-grip. The earth reeled, as reels the spent wrestler whose strength fails him, and then, as if from under the cloak of night, the one had treacherously drawn dagger on the other, came the swift stab of the lightning. Beneath the feet of the bystanders the earth leaped and shuddered, as if smitten to the heart, and, following upon the lightning, there fell such crash of awful thunder as shall never again on earth be heard till that dire day when

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God shall toss man's world—a dead end of dry tinder—to the central furnace of a sun which, in its turn, shall become fuel, to feed the fires of a sun that lightens another universe than ours.

And in the lightning's flash the man saw the whole scene that was outspread before him.

He seemed to be standing upon the outskirts of the same city. The land, that lay nearest to the city wall, was tilled and cultivated, or laid out into walled gardens, with here and there a house, planted around with trees. Farther out the ground was broken and uneven, and, save where a herdsman had built himself a hut and weeded out a stone-enclosed patch of garden, had in many places been allowed to run to waste.

One spot in particular, that rose in a slight declivity, was terraced by step-like ridges, bare as picked ribs, whitening on the desert sands. The summit of the declivity was formed of hard rock, domed and polished like the upper half of a skull, and surrounded by a low and loosely-built wall of stone.

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And here, against the pall of dead night, was to be seen the cross-hung figure of the prisoner who, like some great monarch moving through massed multitudes to his throne, had that day passed on to Calvary and to the cross.

Looking upon that scene, that figure, the dreaming man realised how blind, how misled have been many of those who have essayed to depict that scene, that figure, on canvas or in stone. Too often they do no more than show us a tortured and crucified *man*, with hanging head and glazed eyes, broken, bleeding, and shrunken of body ; sorrowful, even abject of mien ; a figure of infinite pathos, infinite anguish ; a subject inviting infinite tenderness, infinite pity, infinite tears.

Pity ! Looking upon that figure the dreaming man dared less to think of pity than, standing in that sacred presence, to blaspheme.

Anguish and tears of compassion, anguish and tears of repentance, anguish and tears of remorse ! But pity ! The very angels of heaven had shrunk in horror from the impious

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mortal who dared to offer the alms of his pity to the God whom that mortal's sins had stretched upon the cross.

For here was no man, come and compelled to the last awful giving up of the ghost. Here only was God taking with both hands to put off—as a king might put off his crown—the dear human life to which the human heart of Him so passionately clung; the life to part with which it cost Him such black anguish of horror as it has never entered into the heart of man to conceive; the life below, which His love for humanity had made dearer to Him, it may even be, than the life above.

Looking into those eyes the dreamer knew that every moment of the life, which was now ebbing away, had been, and was, an æon of endured agony. Every separate sorrow of every single soul that was, that had been, and that was to come, was lived out to the last pang in the torture chamber of that single soul. Into that chamber only God's eye could see, but the dreaming man knew that, looking therein, God saw the Christ take upon Himself

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the sorrow wherewith Rachel had mourned and refused to be comforted, the burden of David's pain when he cried out : " O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom. Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom ! My son, my son ! " And looking thereon God saw the shame that rent the sick soul of Peter after the denial of his Master and Lord ; saw, even, resting upon the white soul of Christ, the black shadow of despair and remorse under which Judas stole out to hang himself in the Field of Blood.

When first he had looked upon that divine figure, thus mocked and tortured and crucified of men, there had blazed up in the heart of the dreamer such horror of the deed, such blind fury of hatred against the doers, that he had burned to hurl himself single handed against them, sparing neither Jew nor Roman in his vengeance and wrath.

But looking again upon that face, the dreamer knew in his heart of hearts that had there been only one man in the world when Christ came—and he that man—*his* would have been the sins which slew the Saviour,

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his the blood-guilty hands that nailed those sinless hands to the cross.

Not alone He hung, for Him, even on the cross, the malice of His enemies pursued.

There is no human creature so lowly but for once, and for a space, stands immeasurably removed above his fellows, and is honoured before them. For King Death comes once only to the door of each subject, yet, be that subject prince or pauper, courtier or clown, it is meet that when the king comes, he comes in state, and that to the man or woman, whom he thus honours, shall be accorded some measure of the dignity which is due to them who consort with kings. ' There is no one so lowly of station, so meek of spirit, but in that awful hour is wrapt about, in the eyes of others, with the august arrogance of them who come to die; and that, even in death, the Christ should be robbed of that last lone dignity, that isolate distinction which death confers—Him they made but as one of a company of common thieves and robbers, brought out to suffer together one common and shameful fate.

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This they did, knowing not that the manner of Christ's death, in company with nameless thieves, should for all time make that death more wonderful and more memorable, and those nameless thieves remembered by the world when many of the world's kings and rulers are forgotten. This they did, knowing not that the presence of those thieves should call from Him, who hung in their midst, words which even in death proclaimed Him King of Heaven and Lord of Life; words which, even to the end of the world, shall remain humanity's surest pledge and promise of eternal life.

Three figures there were, co-sufferers in that last and most cruel agony—comrades in death, though in life such worlds apart—yet was there never a man or woman, witnessing that final tragedy, who had eyes for any but the One. For never had the Christ seemed so robed in awful majesty as now when, naked and bleeding, and mocked of all, with head erect (the head that He was so soon of His own accord to bow, in giving up the ghost) He

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looked upon the company of His murderers, and with lips whence issued nor sigh nor groan, He prayed the prayer whereto this world and this world's God shall never cease to listen :
“ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Hearing these words, Hell shuddered, for by these words Satan and his princes knew that their kingdom had for ever slipped from them.

In death, as in life, they had tried and tempted the Holy One ; and in death, as in life, Christ, the King and Captain of our salvation, had conquered. To the last they had hoped against hope for some word of anger to man, of reproach to God, and now, when the first word from the cross was uttered, the word for which Satan and his host had waited and watched, it was a prayer from the Crucified One for God's forgiveness of His murderers.

At that word Hell reeled, and gathered itself together in one final and desperate effort.

Even as the cunning of Satan had caused

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him to set a *Judas among the disciples*—little thinking, poor fool, that the witness, “*I have betrayed innocent blood!*” wrung thus reluctantly, and in the sincerity of despair, from that arch enemy and traitor, should for ever echo down the ages, a more tremendous testimony to the absolute sinlessness of Christ than the witness of Christ’s faithful disciples and friends—even so had the cunning of old Satan caused him to set that tool and fool of the devil, an unrepentant sinner, as Christ’s death-comrade and co-sufferer.

To man that is born of woman it is not given always to walk with unfaltering feet. Yet so long as the sinner hates his sin, so long as he truly repents, and seeks new strength from Heaven, so long is that sinner the much-forgiven, dearly-loved child of God.

Such an one was he who hung on the Saviour’s right.

When, however, the sinner has sunk to such depths of infamy as, for its own sake, to love what is evil, for its own sake, to loathe what is good—when he cherishes in his heart such

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hatred of God that he would, had he it in his power, be guilty, in act as well as in thought, of God-murder—then is that sinner in terrible straits.

Such an one had been he who hung on the Saviour's left.

Was it by chance that there had been permitted to suffer with the Christ two such men as they who were set by His side? Yea, but it was the "chance" which "Eternal God did guide." For in all that Life of lives, which was lived on the earth two thousand years ago, there was no act, no occurrence, but was pregnant with stupendous meaning, with stupendous issues. And in that symbolic trinity, the Christ and the two thieves, thus strangely brought together on Calvary's Mount, were to be seen the mystic spokesmen and representatives of Human Nature, Satanic Nature, and Divine Nature. Here was being enacted a triple tragedy, so elemental, yet so tremendous, that Earth, and Hell, and Heaven were once, and for all time, met and mirrored within a few square feet of ground.

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And then it was that Hell and Satan, brought to bay, made of the as yet impenitent one, who hung on the Saviour's left, the mouth-piece of Hell, whereby even now Hell hoped to tempt the Saviour to His own undoing. "If Thou be indeed the Christ, come down from the cross and save Thyself and us."

But he who hung on the right rebuked the reviler, and, looking to the Christ, cried out, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom."

Whereat the dreaming man, gazing upon him who had so spoken, saw that it was *his own face* which looked out at him from the cross on the Saviour's right; even as, were it given to you, who read this story of his dream, to see that scene as the dreaming man saw it—it would be your face which you would then see, even as I, who write the story of the dream, would see my own, the face of sinning, suffering, repenting, forgiven, and redeemed humanity.

God grant that when you and I come, as come we must, in this world or the next, to

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see that scene as the dreaming man saw it—God grant that it be not from the cross, which was set at the Saviour's left, that your face and my face shall look out then.

And, turning to the penitent one, the Christ made answer: "This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise!"

Here was promise, considered, deliberate, definite, and given by One who cannot lie.

Listening to these words the dreaming man doubted no longer, for it was so that He who *is* the Truth had spoken.

And, with these words ringing in his ears, the wonder of the man's dream passed, and he awoke—awoke to the dull chill of the narrow room, the dark fireplace, the dead fire—awoke to a yet more wonderful re-awakening, wherein he should dream no more.

Suddenly the walls of the little room, wherein he had slept and dreamed, widened, and fell away. The black fireplace, the dead fire, faded before his eyes.

Ah, God! what meant that pain at his heart, that strangling in his throat, the dark-

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ness that was closing around him? His hands clutched wildly at empty air, he fell back—then . . . light—music—child-laughter—bird-song, flower-fragrance—and the abiding calm of infinite and perfect peace.

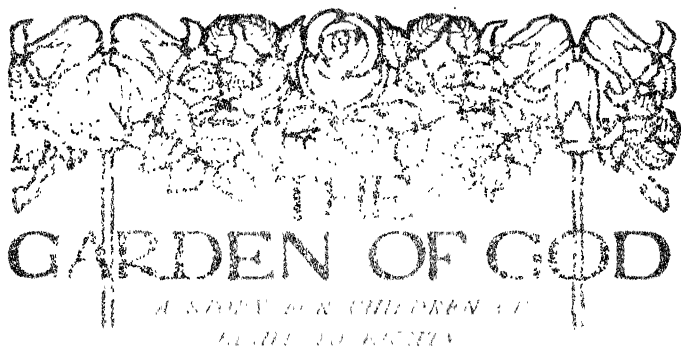
And, ah! that sweet saint-face! how well he remembered its pure Madonna oval! his mother's. . . . Those deep, sad eyes under the wide brows, crowned with silver—the father whom he had never ceased to mourn! . . . Then, ah! dear God, could it be true? already he was young and glad and strong again—those radiant eyes, that smile, that voice—the worshipped maiden of his manhood, his love, his wife, the mother of his children, who had taken with her the sunshine out of the world when she went . . . and, in her arms, his and her little one, his lost darling!

And then, dearer, immeasurably, infinitely dearer even than these, the face, the human face, of his and their crucified Saviour and God!

And again those words: "This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise!"

He was assured of Eternal Life.





IT was broad noonday in the garden, and so hot that one could see the air palpitating and quivering above the gravel paths in undulant haze of heat. Even the butterfly gasped for breath, and grumbled because the swaying of the grasses set stirring a warm puff, which was like the opening of an oven. The sun seemed so near, and was trying so hard to be hot, that the daisies said they could see him spinning and panting as he stood above them ; but that, I think, was only their fancy, although it is true that he was shining so exactly over-head, that there was not a streak of shadow where one could creep for shelter from the sweltering heat. All the flowers were parched and drooping, and except for the passing *buzz* where a bee

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went drowsily by, or buried himself with a contented *burr* in the heart of a pansy, not a sound stirred the sultry silence.

All at once there was a sudden scurry among the birds. A cat which had been basking and purring in the sunshine, opening and shutting an eye, every now and then, to make believe that she was not sleepy, had dropped off into a doze, and now she awakened, yawning. This was the signal for a general stir.

"Phew! but it is hot, to be sure!" exclaimed the butterfly, as he darted up for a stretch from the poppy-head on which he had been sitting, and went waltzing, angle-wise, down the gravelled path of the garden, lacing the long, green lines of the boxwood with loops of crimson and gold.

"I hope my weight won't inconvenience you," he said with airy politeness to the lily, dropping himself lazily, and without waiting for an answer, upon her delicate head, which drooped so feebly beneath this new burden that several scented petals fluttered fainting

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to the ground. "I am grieved to see you looking so sadly," he continued, after he had settled himself to his liking, "but what on earth, my good soul, makes you lean forward in that uncomfortable attitude? There is a charmingly shady spot under the shelter of the wall behind you. Why don't you lean in that direction? As it is, you are going out of your way to make yourself uncomfortable, besides which I should very much prefer to be out of the heat."

"I should be glad to move into the shade," said the lily gently, "but my sweetheart, the rose, has fallen asleep by the border, and I am leaning over her to keep the sun from her buds."

"How very charming you are!" lisped the butterfly languidly, and in a tone of polite contempt which seemed to imply, "And what a fool!"

"But your ideas are a little crude, don't you know?" he went on, "though of course interesting. It is easy to see you are not a person of the world. When you have

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travelled about, and learnt as much as I have, you will come to look at such things in a different way."

"Yes, you have travelled, and lived in the world, and seen a great deal," said the lily; "but I have *loved*; and it is by loving, as well as by living, that one learns."

"Don't presume to lecture me!" was the impatient answer. "Fancy a flower finding fault with a butterfly! Don't you know that I am your superior in the scale of being! But, tell me, does this love of which you speak bring happiness?"

"The greatest of all happiness," whispered the lily, almost to herself, and with infinite tenderness—her white bells seeming to light up and overflow, like human eyes, as she spoke. "To love truly, and to be loved, is indeed to be favoured of heaven. All the good things which this world contains are not worthy to be offered in exchange for the love of one faithful heart."

"Then I must learn to love," said the butterfly decisively, "for happiness has

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always been my aim. Tell me how to begin."

"You'll have to begin by unlearning," put in a big double-dahlia, who was standing by like a sentinel, and looking as stiff and stuck-up as if he had just been appointed flower-policeman to the garden."

"Don't you be afraid that any one's going to fall in love with you," was the spiteful rejoinder of the butterfly, edging himself round and round on a lily-bell as he spoke. "Your place, my good creature, is in the vegetable garden, with the cauliflowers and the artichokes. There is something distinguished about a white chrysanthemum, and the single-dahlias are shapely, although they do stare so ; but the double-dahlias!"—and the butterfly affected a pretty shudder of horror which made the double-dahlia stiffen on his stem with rage.

"How dare you speak slightly of my family!" he said indignantly. "And as for those big chrysanthemums! they're just like tumbled heaps of worsted, or that shaggy-

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eyed skye-terrier dog that we see sometimes in the garden—untidy, shapeless, lumpy things *I* call them !”

The butterfly, who had been alternately opening and shutting his wings, as if he thought the sight of such splendour was too dazzling to be borne continuously, but really because he knew that the sombre tinting, which they displayed when closed, heightened, by contrast, their gorgeous colouring when open, was nothing if not well-bred, so he simply pretended to stifle a yawn in the dahlia's face, and to make believe that he had not heard what was said.

“After all,” he said, turning his back pointedly upon the dahlia, and shutting up his wings with a final snap—just as a fine lady closes a fan—“after all, my dear lily, I don't know whether it's worth my while to learn to love ; for, by this time next year, you and I will be dead, and it will be all the same then to us as if we had never loved, or even lived at all.”

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"I know nothing about death," replied the lily, "but no one who loves can doubt immortality, and if the rose and I are not already immortal, I believe that our love will make us so."

"What is this immortality?" said the butterfly. "I have heard the word used a great deal in my wanderings, but I never quite knew the meaning of it."

"It is the finding again, after death, of those we have loved and lost; and the loving and living with them forever, I think," answered his companion.

"I don't believe you know anything about it," said the butterfly, decisively. "All the men and women I've met—and they ought to know—used ever so much longer words."

"Perhaps you are right," replied the lily quietly, bending forward to shield a stray rose-bud from the burning sun, "but to be forever with those I love would be immortality enough for me. And I heard the maiden who walks in the garden speaking yesterday, and I

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remember that she said it was more godlike to love one little child, purely and unselfishly, than to have a heart filled with a thousand vast vague aspirations after things we cannot understand."

II

How strangely still it was in the garden! Summer had gone, and October was nearly over, but the day had been so bright and warm that every one said the winter must be a very long way off. But since sunset the air had been getting more and more chilly, and the stars were glittering like cold steel, and the moon looked so bright and large, that the flowers, which had awakened with an icy pain at their hearts, could scarcely believe it was night and not day, for every tiny grass-blade and buttercup stood out with startling distinctness on the grass. A strange, sharp scent was in the air, and a singular stillness was abroad.

There was no "going" in the trees, nor bough-swing among the branches, but all

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stood rigid and motionless as if intently listening.

“Perhaps they are listening for the first footfall of the winter—the winter which is coming to kill us,” said the lily sadly, bending down, as she spoke, to twine herself protectingly around the rose.

“Perhaps we are dead already,” said the rose, with a shudder, “and are but ghost-flowers in a ghostly garden. How cold and wan my petals look in this pallid light! And is this grey place—blanched and silent and still as death—our sweet-scented and sunny garden, that glowed with warm colour and was astir with life?”

Just then, and before the lily could answer, they heard a sudden cry of pain.

It was the butterfly, who had fallen, half dead with cold, from a sycamore bough, and now lay shelterless and shivering on the frozen path. “Creep up upon my leaves, dear butterfly,” said the lily tenderly, as she bent towards him, “and I will try and find a warm place for you near my heart.”

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"Oh, I'm so frightened! I'm so frightened!" he sobbed. "The world is dying; even now the trees seem still and dead. Soon the stars will fall out of the sky into the garden. Shall we be left in darkness when the moon is dead? Already her face is deadly pale, although she shines so brightly. And what has come to the trees? On every bough there sparkle a thousand lights. Are they stars which have dropped from the sky?"

"They are not stars at all," said the lily, bending over him and hushing him to her heart as a mother hushes a frightened child, "but diamonds for the Frost King's crown. I think we shall die to-night. Are you asleep, dear rose? The end is coming. Let us meet it waking, and in each other's arms."

"It is coming, dear heart, and coming soon," said the rose with a cry. "Already I can scarcely speak for pain. The night grows ever colder and more cold. And how strangely bright the moon is! What was that streak of silver across the sky? A star which has fallen from its place?"

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"I think it was the shining angel God sends to fetch us," answered the lily. "Dear love, the end will soon be here. Already the pain has reached my heart; already I begin to die."

"And I, too," said the rose. "I sink—I faint—the sharp pain stings and bites! Hold me fast, darling! I scarce can see you now."

"Nor I you, sweetheart!"

"Hold me closer—closer. Everything seems to fall away."

"Everything but love, dearest, and where love is, all is. At least we shall die together."

Icier and more icy grew the air; brighter and whiter shone the moonlight on the garden, until the sunflower's shadow lay like ebony upon silver along the grass; colder and more steely glittered the stars, and closer crept the pain to the heart of the dying flowers. All the long night through the silent trees stood rigid and motionless, but now they listened no longer, for winter was come indeed, and on

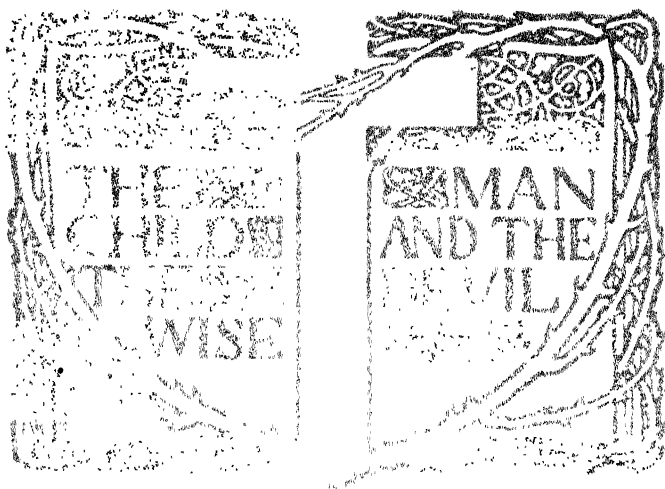
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every branch the frost-crystals glinted and sparkled.

And when morning dawned, the butterfly lay dead for ever, but the lily and the rose were the fairest flowers a-bloom in the Garden of God.

THE
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PROEM

I DREAMT that I stood within the walls of a great city. Under the deep, dense blue of an Italian sky, innumerable towers, domes, temples, and palaces, glittered and whitened—like headstones bleaching in a cemetery—in the morning sunshine; and high overhead soared the cross-crowned cupola of a huge cathedral. •

And in the streets and squares of the city, I beheld the vastest concourse which the eye of man has ever witnessed. People of every race and every nation swarmed, ant-like, in

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house and street ; and when I looked beyond the city's limits, I saw that the country, for many miles around, was thick with tents and pavilions, so that the place had become, as it were, the camping ground of nations.

Then, turning to one who stood near me, I said, " Surely this is Rome, the Eternal City ? "

" It is," he made answer.

" And yonder church," I said, " is it not the church of Saint Peter ? "

" It has so been called of old," he responded, " but it is called so now no longer."

" What, then, call they it ? " I asked.

" The Church of the ONE GOD," replied the man.

Then said I, " Tell me, I pray you, why the name has been so changed, and what means this multitude, for I am but newly arrived in the city."

Looking at me curiously, the man made answer, " Whence come you, that you know not they have found the body of the Christ ? "

Then said I : " Nay, that were impossible, for we know that our Saviour Christ was

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crucified, and buried. And that He rose again the third day, according to the Scripture, and ascended into heaven, where He sitteth on the right hand of the Father."

But he answered me sternly, "It is true that the man, whom you call the Saviour Christ, did claim for Himself that He, being equal with God, was not subject unto death, but would rise again the third day. And it is true, too, that because His body was not found, His disciples gave out that He had so risen and ascended. Wherefore Him the world hath most idolatrously worshipped, according unto a mortal the glory which belongs only unto God. Which idolatry God has for nineteen hundred years endured patiently, visiting not their evil-doing upon the heads of the idolaters, but waiting until, in the fulness of time, He might put to scorn the pretensions of the crucified Nazarene, and make manifest the abundance of God's mercy and the magnitude of man's sinning.

"For know you, that they have found in Palestine, in the rock-hewn sepulchre whither

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it was borne nineteen hundred years ago by Joseph of Arimathæa, the body of Him who claimed that death had no dominion over Him."

Then said I, "And has any, for this reason, forsaken Christ?"

"You see how many people are here gathered together?" he made answer. "Think you it is in the power of any man to number them?"

"As well might one seek to number the stars in the heavens, the sand on the sea-shore!" I replied.

Then said he, "You speak truly. Here, for the first time, the monarchs of every nation which has held the Christian faith are, with their courts and councils, their lords spiritual and temporal, gathered together. Know you why they are met?"

"I know not," I answered.

Then said he, "They are here to make solemn confession, on their own behalf, and on behalf of the people over whom they rule, of the iniquity of which they and their forefathers have been guilty, in that they have

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bowed the knee to a mortal, worshipping as God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, one who was of flesh and blood, and subject unto death, as we all are. They are met to make public and solemn renunciation of their error. To-day, at noon, in yonder church, and in every church throughout the world where Christ has been worshipped as God, Christ shall be renounced and proclaimed man; the symbols of the Trinity and of the Cross shall be cast down and destroyed, that thereby all men may know that God is not Three but One.

“If you will, you shall come with me to yonder cathedral, where I will show you this great ceremony, that you may believe for yourself that Jesus of Nazareth was a deceiver.”

But I made answer: “Though you show me this and more,—though, like Thomas, I behold the wounds in the hands and feet, and thrust my finger into the pierced side, yet will I not believe that Jesus, my Lord and Master, was a deceiver, for I know in Whom I have trusted. Rather, will I believe that this thing,

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of which you speak, is one of those wiles of Satan, of which we have been warned in Holy Writ :—how that in the latter days there should arise ‘false prophets,’ whose ‘coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders,’ that they who serve not the truth should ‘believe a lie.’ ”

Then said the man, “It is childish to refuse to believe the evidence of one’s senses,—as childish as it is to be satisfied with so outworn a creed as yours.”

“Were I to judge by sense,” I made answer, “I should believe that I see the sun, at a moment when he is actually below the horizon, and when I know that it is but his reflected image, and not himself, which I see. And to be satisfied with the Christian faith may be childlike, but is not childish ; for though the child may find in it all he needs, yet many of the wisest of this world have confessed that the longer they have pondered it, the closer they have studied it, the more cause have they found for wonder, for worship, and for love. The great minds of the world—

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the Shakespeares and Miltons of the race—are on our side, not on yours, and for the very reason that they *were* great; for the reason that they *were* wise, and did not merely think themselves so. It is true that ours is the simplest of all faiths. It must needs be so, since it appeals alike to rich and to poor, to the young and to the old, to the sick and to the strong; and not less to the sempstress in her garret, who,—when she lays down the work at which she has been toiling early and late,—is too weary-eyed and worn to take up a book, or even to think, than to the woman of fashion, or to the man of leisure who has devoted his life to the search for knowledge. Were it not so, and were the strength of its appeal only proportionate to the intellectual capacity of the individual, then half humanity—the half which needs Him most—would be left without the help and hope which are given freely by the Great Consoler. And yet, notwithstanding its simplicity, I believe that, could we stand with God at the centre of all things, we should see that the one supreme

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and controlling Law—the pivot upon which the laws of this and all other universes turn—is the law of vicarious sacrifice, the law which had ordained, ere the foundations of the world were laid, that the sins of the world should be borne by God's Son, the sinless Christ."

Then said the man derisively, "He of whom you speak as the Son of God, was but the child of Mary and Joseph the Carpenter. If He claimed to be other than this, He spoke a lie."

"Surely you have no child of your own," I made answer, "that you can so speak of Him Who consecrated childhood for ever by His own divine Childhood,—who consecrated it afresh, with a higher, holier meaning, when, in His Divine Manhood, He uttered those words, which, to the ears of every mother of to-day, are as full of sweet music, as ever they were to the mothers of Palestine: 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven.'"

Then said the man, "All this is nothing to me, who have neither wife nor child."

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“That I can well believe,” I answered, “for surely no father, no mother—whether the little one were on earth or in heaven—could hear the sweet music of those words unmoved. That picture of the little child nestling as naturally, as trustfully, in our Saviour’s arms, as in the arms of her mother, and smiling up with perfect love, perfect confidence, into the face which looked down upon hers with Divine tenderness, Divine Fatherliness—though, for His ears, no child-lips might ever lisp the wonderful word ‘Father’—has consecrated all children to the Christ, and the Christ to every child. It must remain, for all time, the one picture of spotless purity upon which human eye has looked—that interchange of loving smiles between the innocent child and the sinless Man. So long as that picture is guarded in the heart of one mother, so long you can never hope to destroy Christianity. That little child, in the arms of Jesus, has struck deadlier blows at the enemies of the Cross than all the arguments of all the theologians. That child is

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the most powerful foe whom the armies of unbelief have to fear."

Even as I spoke, there came the sudden roll of cannon.

"It is the signal for the procession to start," said my companion; and over that great assembly there passed a tremor of expectancy, like the stirring of leaves when rain is nigh.

Afar off we heard a vibrating hum—like the droning of insects on a sunny summer's noon; and the sound moved me strangely, for I knew it was the distant voice of a mighty multitude. Sometimes it died away, as the chiming of bells dies away when the wind falls, and then it swelled again until the hum was as the murmur of an incoming tide, and soon it was like the roar of breakers upon the shore, so that we could hear the blare of trumpets, blending with the drums' monotonous beat, and the cheers rippling along the lines like volleying bells.

And then, slow-moving to stately music, there came into view a procession of supreme

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splendour. Monarch after monarch, Kaiser and Czar, Emperors, Kings, and Queens, arrayed in royal robes, and surrounded by their courts and counsellors, passed by in state, on their way to the cathedral. And as sovereign succeeded to sovereign, pageant to pageant, there went up, from that vast assembly, such thunder of applause, that the thread of my dream was broken, and the scene shifted as it were by magic, and in a moment.

I was no longer in the streets, where all Rome was ringing with the riotous uproar, but kneeling—one of innumerable thousands—in the great cathedral. A rolling, as of thunder, was still in my ears, but I knew it now for the rolling of the organ, and I heard it sink, and sink, until it was lost in listening silence, out of which arose the voice of one leading the people in prayer :

“ Almighty Father, the ONE GOD of heaven and earth and Judge of all men We do most humbly beseech Thee to look pitifully upon us, Thy people, who by following after the Deceiver,

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Jesus, and according unto a man the worship which pertaineth only to God, have committed grievous idolatry against Thy Divine Majesty, and are deserving only of Thy just wrath and fiery condemnation. We do most earnestly repent, and humbly implore that Thou wilt mercifully grant us Thy forgiveness, and keep us evermore in the faith and fear of the ONE God, Who liveth and reigneth world without end. Amen."

Then, while the vast congregation remained kneeling, the kings and rulers arose, one by one, and, divesting themselves of their royal robes, walked with bowed heads, and knelt before the altar, in sight of all, that they might make solemn intercession, on their own behalf, and on behalf of their people, for the sin of which the nations had been guilty.

And after these great ones of the earth had so remained for some minutes, he, who led the congregation in prayer, turned to the kneeling multitude, saying :

" Do you for evermore renounce the Deceiver

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who, claiming that he had come to take away the sins of the world, has laid upon the world the burden of nineteen hundred years' idolatry?"

And, as with one voice, kings and people made answer :

"We renounce him for evermore."

Then, like an overcharged bosom upgathered in a sob, the swelling dome of the great cathedral gave utterance to a sullen, sudden, reverberant note of woe—the death-knell of a God—and, at the sound, a strange hush, which was not silence, but palpitated, as it were, with the pent-up breathing and tumultuous heart-beating of a multitude, fell upon the assembly.

And he who stood at the altar reached forward, and took from its place, over the table of God, the image of the crucified Christ. Turning to the people, he held it, upraised, for a moment before them.

Then crying out: "The reign of the Christ is at end. The ONE GOD reigneth and is worshipped evermore," he dashed it

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down into atoms on the marble pavement at his feet.

And, out in the sunlight the cannon thundered, and from a hundred steeples the bells of Rome burst forth into exultant song, that all men might know the Religion of Sorrow was ended, the Reign of Joy was begun. .

I

IN my dream I looked down upon the world, and I saw that the world was in darkness, save for the light which streamed from an upraised Cross.

And I saw that the light which shone from the Cross made manifest the very heaven of heavens, so that even while men trod the dark and thorny ways of the world, they might at any time look up, and see above them the loving Father-face of God.

And some I saw who, kindling little candles, of their own making, at the beacon-fire of the Cross, cried out, "Come, see the light we have found! Here is light, compared to which all other lights are as darkness!"

Others said: "See how light it is! *This* is the light of day. Why stands yonder Cross

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in the sunshine, to throw its gloomy shadow over the world? Come let us pull it down, that we may be no longer saddened by the symbol of eternal sorrow."

As they so spoke, the light from the Cross suddenly faded out, and with it all the little lights that had been kindled at its fire, leaving the world in darkness, utter and complete.

And I heard the voice of God saying : " Lo ! I have given unto mankind the most precious gift I had to bestow.

" The creature can at no time be equal with its Creator, and as man may not become God, —God, out of the great love He bore the world, was willing to become man. Wherefore the High and Holy One Who inhabiteth eternity, did for man's sake, humble Himself to become a helpless babe,—to live man's life, to share man's sorrows, and to die man's death, that henceforth, for every man, life might lose its loneliness and death its horror, for God was become not only man's Maker and Judge, but also man's divine Comrade and Brother.

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“And now, in these latter days, this divinest of gifts—this sacrifice of Himself by the Creator, for the sake of His creature—is, by that creature, rejected and scorned. The most sacred and solemn of all mysteries is become a thing of which men make mock, denying,—because of the very humanity which for their sakes He had stooped to share—the divinity which was His, ere He had called humanity into being.

“They speak of their risen and ascended Saviour as a dead dreamer, or a vain deceiver, declaring that Christianity is an outworn creed, a thing of yesterday, and the story of the Divine Man, a fable, fit only for the ears of a child.”

And God spoke again saying :

“O faithless and godless generation! O mockers of good and workers of iniquity! have I not already borne with you over-long? Day by day have I stood knocking at your door, entreating you to accept a gift which, were it not offered freely, you would count life itself well spent to win. And day by day you have

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thrust Me out, and driven Me forth—as you would thrust away a thief or a beggar from your door.

“But now behold! I come to you no more. You—at whose door your God Himself has so long stood, entreating entrance vainly—shall knock, unheeded, at the Door of Life. Out of your own mouth shall proceed your judgment. You have said that there is no Christ; that He who came to bear away the sin of the world, and, by His glorious resurrection from the dead, to bring unto all men the gift of eternal life, was either deceived, or a deceiver, who lies, and has lain, these two thousand years, in His unknown and unhonoured grave in Palestine. It is thus that you have spoken, and by your own words shall come your condemnation.

“I, who gave, can take away. I, who made, can unmake. Let be. . . . It is as you say. . . . There is no Christ.”

And as God so spoke, it seemed to me that He wiped out—as a child wipes out an unfinished sum from a slate—all that the great

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name of Jesus means, and has meant to humanity.

For one instant, I saw, shining down the dark vista of the ages, the supreme figure of the Divine Man. Below me, as on a midnight plain, that stretched away into infinite darkness, lay the wounded in life's battle—the widowed, the orphaned, the friendless, the sick, the halt, and the sin-bound. And I saw that it was this one divine and shining figure, the very Light of the World, to which all hands were uplifted,—upon which every eye was fixed. I saw the Christ look down upon His suffering creatures with eyes from which streamed tears of tender and pitying love; I heard the great and yearning cry which rose to His lips at sight of their sorrows; I saw Him stretch forth His arms to them, as a mother stretches forth her arms to her stricken child,—and then the sublime and lonely figure of the Man of Sorrows faded out for ever, and upon helpless, hopeless, sin-stained and suffering humanity, darkness and despair descended, like vultures descending upon their prey.

II

YET again I dreamed a dream in which pictures came and went as in a glass.

I looked down upon a Christless world, and I saw that though the same sun made glad the morning, the same stars made beautiful the night, the men and women, who dwelt thereon, were become haggard, restless and unhappy. Some few there were who sat together, laughing feverishly, but there was no mirth in their laughter, for their faces were anxious and perturbed, and even while they laughed, they cast uneasy glances about them, as if fearing to be surprised by an unseen foe. I saw, too, that they who had protested that the bread and wine of the Gospel was a mouthful they could not swallow, ate greedily of strange meats which came from other altars, or which were prepared by the hands of the high priests of

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a new philosophy. They who declared that reason would not allow them to believe that God could once become Incarnate, saw no reason to doubt the manifold Re-incarnations of Man. They who complained that they found the straight and level highway of Christianity too difficult a road for them to follow, or that there was no sure foothold thereon, were content to lose themselves among the mazes of superstition, or to flounder and stumble among the stony wastes of unbelief.

Many I saw who wandered backward and forward aimlessly, as if seeking for something which they found not. At times one would cry out, "Lo, I have it!" and the others would cease their search, and run with gladness to hear him. But so often as one thus called out, so often they, who ran, would return whence they came, unsatisfied and unfilled, until not a few ceased to give ear at all.

Then said I to one who passed by, "For what seek you?"

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"For the answer to the Riddle of Life," he replied.

"Why trouble yourself about things which are too great for you?" I said. "Do as others do. Eat, drink, marry, beget children, and be merry. You can wait to know the answer to the riddle, till the day when you must go behind the Great Dark to seek it for yourself. That day is, however, as yet far distant. Your years are not many, and, haply, you have still a long time to live."

But the man made answer: "What we call 'time' is but a single sunray thrown across the infinite void of Eternity, and 'life' is but the floating-flicker of a mote that vanishes, even as it becomes visible therein. What matters it, then, to the mote in the sunbeam whether it be a minute or a moment drifting across the ray from dark to dark? It is not because I fear whatever the future has for me, personally, of good or ill that I seek to read Life's Riddle aright. It is because I have a wife whom I love, a child that I worship, and the thought

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that one day—any day—death may part us, never, perhaps, to set eyes on one another again, haunts me, holds me, and makes existence a very hell. It were horror enough to lose a dear one, even were we sure that those who love each other here, shall hereafter love each other, and be together again. But even that much of certainty has been denied us, for Death closes, in the face of the living, the door through which he has hurried their beloved dead."

"You, and those you love, are, at least—whether living or dead—in the hand of God," I said.

"What know you of God?" asked the man.

"That He is great," I made answer.

"So great that He cares neither for me nor mine," said the man bitterly. "Who am I, that God should trouble Himself concerning me? Why should I, who am but one among many millions of men whom He has made, be of more account to Him than one egg in the belly of the herring which He has made also?"

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If the egg become a fish, it is well : if it be destroyed or devoured, it is well, equally. So, too, with the man. God has set the sun in the sky to warm him by day, the moon and stars to companion him by night. God says to him, 'I have done My part, and done it well. The way is clear for you. Go forth, now, to fare for yourself,—to sorrow or to be glad, to be hungry or to be full, to be sick or to be strong, to live or to die, as may chance to you.' ”

Then said I, “One Who cannot lie has told us that the very hairs of our head are numbered, and that not a sparrow shall fall, and be forgotten before the Father.”

“Whom mean you?” asked the man.

“The Christ of God,” I made answer.

Then said the man sadly, “Christ! There is no Christ. Would God there were! Until I ceased to believe in the Christ, I realised not that, except through Him, we know no more of the Ruler of the Universe, than did he who of old complained, ‘Canst thou by searching, find out God?’ ”

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“Except God reveal Himself to man, man knows not what God is, nor whether God be, at all.

“Once I believed that God had so revealed Himself, and then this earth was the ante-chamber to heaven. Now it is but a prison, whence there is no escape—a prison in which we are held captive at the will of an Unknown Gaoler. What matters it to me that the earth be beautiful? What matters it to the prisoner that his cell be painted, when he knows that the skeleton-hand of Death, the executioner, may at any moment drag him forth from the dear companionship of his loved ones, and hustle him or them away to an unknown fate? While I believed that God had through Christ revealed Himself, every soul on earth was sacred to me. We were members of one divine family. We were brothers and sisters in our Brother-Lord and Redeemer. Now, we are but fellow-victims who are flung to life's lions together in the same arena. Then, our very bereavements were sanctified to us. Sorrow was God's accolade. It was the sword

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stroke which bade us arise God's knights, ready ever to draw sword in His service. But now we have no such call to nobility, for each lives to himself. We are no longer knights, banded together in a noble cause, but units in a mob, scrambling and fighting, one with the other, for the trinkets which are tossed to us by our capricious mistress, Fate.

“When I believed that God Himself had stooped to share our joys and our sorrows, human life was made evermore beautiful and divine. Then the very earth beneath our feet was sacred, since He had trodden it; then was this robe of flesh, which He had worn, a white garment that, for His dear sake, we must keep unspotted from the world. Then did Art and Song, picture and poem, sunrise and sunset, and the play of evening light upon the sea, combine in one divine conspiracy to urge us heavenward; then not a flower in the field, not a face in the street, but called us to a higher and holier life. But now our life!—but what matters our life? If Christ be

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not ; if God be not as Christ revealed Him "——

I heard no more, for the man had passed on to seek elsewhere for the answer to the Riddle of Life.

III

IN my dream I beheld yet another picture of the Christless world.

A woman lay dying in a garret, and to her came one who was very wise, saying, "You have sent for me, because you would have word with me ere you die. If you know aught which concerns me, or if there is any matter upon which I can advise you, speak now, and I will give heed."

And the woman said: "I was but a girl—vain and foolish, perhaps, but with no thought of evil—when evil befell me.

"I have done evil since, and by my own choosing, but God, Who is my Judge, knows that I fell into that first folly scarce knowing what I did, save that I trusted the man to whom my heart was given.

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“But evil is like the sea, and has no pity on the foolish or the ignorant. Just as deep water sucks under, and swallows up the child who has accidentally fallen into it, while it bears harmlessly upon its bosom the man who has learnt to swim, so the young man or maiden, who ventures into evil ignorantly, is swallowed up and drawn under, while others who seek vice deliberately, may, at least, evade—if only by their very knowledge of evil—the outward penalty of their sin. I slipt into sin unthinkingly, as a child might slip from an unguarded place into deep water; and my sin was like the dead weight of wet clothes about the drowning child, dragging me down and down until the waters closed over my head. Some, at whose door I knocked—when I set out to seek the work which should keep my baby and myself in bread—drew back their skirts, as if my very touch were contamination, and bade me be-gone, for a wanton. Others spoke kindly and pitifully, and would have sent me to a ‘Home for the Fallen,’ but I told them that

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it was work, not charity, which I needed, and that, if they would but give me employment, they should find me a diligent servant, and true. But they shook their heads, and said it was sad, very sad, and they were sorry. This one excused herself because she feared to seem to encourage immorality; a second hesitated to receive me into her household lest she should give offence to those who were already serving her. Others spoke uneasily of 'brothers' or 'sons,' and though many pitied me, and some offered me money, each was anxious to pass me on.

"It seemed to me then, in my despair, as if all women were either heartless or cowardly, and all men vile; and, as that which I had lost could never be regained, I asked myself of what use was it to continue the hopeless struggle—whether it were worse to go clad in a garment of vice, than to slink from door to door, scarce covered by the rags of what had once been virtue.

"I need not tell you the familiar story. Let me hasten on to say that, while I was

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leading a life of shame—with no hope in this world or in the next—I met with an accident in the street, and was carried to a hospital, where, while I was recovering, the good Sister, who tended me, talked much and lovingly of the Christ.”

“It is ever so with these Christians,” said the wise man, interrupting her. “A sick woman is sent to them to be healed in the body, and they let slip no opportunity of seeking to entice her away to follow after superstition.”

Then said the woman: “How comes it, then, that you, who deny Christ, have built no hospital of your own, to which to send your sick?”

But the wise man was silent.

Then said the woman, turning on him fiercely: “What have you to give me in return for the faith you have taken from me? Is there any hope for such as I, save in the Cross of Christ? I was despised of all, a thing of shame at which the very children of the street—old, alas! in the knowledge of

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evil—pointed the finger of scorn ; and ONE came to me, speaking me gently and lovingly, and greeting me, the outcast, with such greeting as is accorded only to women whom men honour. He came to me, in my despair, to bid me hope ; He came to me in my degradation, to bring me back my self-respect.

“ And when I said, ‘ Lord, it is too late ! I have sinned away the very soul of me, and can never be pure again,’ He made answer, ‘ Believe it not, daughter. It is devils’ doctrine, even though they teach it in My name. You can never regain your innocence, for innocence (which is often but another name for ignorance) is a flower that once plucked, a vase that once broken, can never be the same again. But purity is not of earth, but of heaven. It is a white star set in the sky—a star which makes pure the soul of all who look thereon steadfastly and with longing.’

“ Then said I, ‘ Yes, Lord, but though I have striven—oh, so despairingly!—to clamber out of the black and seething abyss into which

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I have fallen, the burden of my sin is ever a clog around my neck to drag me back and down to more shameful depths.'

"But He made answer, 'Even now, I lift the burden from your shoulders to Mine. That you may be set free from your sins, and the consequences of your sins, I bear, and have borne, the burden of eternal sorrow.'

"And I said, 'Yes, Lord. Yet can I never undo the past. The soul of me is black and corrupt, and foul as with leprosy, and not all the waters of the world can wash me clean again.'

"But He made answer, '*You* can never undo the past, but *I* can, and will; and though your soul be as black as you say, yet can I make it whiter than the newly-fallen snow.'

"And I said, 'Yes, Lord, but I am weak— weaker and more unstable than water. Not once, but ten thousand times, have I risen from the mire, and striven, with all the strength that was in me, to walk without stumbling. And not once, but ten thousand times, have I found myself low-groveling in

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the mire again. And now I have neither heart nor hope to continue the unequal contest. The sins that I have committed in the past, those sins shall I go on committing to my life's end, for I know myself too well not to know my own weakness, and my inability to resist temptation.'

"And He made answer, 'Though your stumblings were twenty times ten thousand, yet so long as you will but arise after each fall, so long will I have for you in My heart an especial tenderness. And if you will but come to Me, saying, "Lord, I bring to Thee my sin, and I bring to Thee, too, mine inability to resist sin. Help Thqu me, for in myself there is no help," then will I abide with you by day and by night, then will I fight with you and for you, until My strength has made you strong, and you have learned to loathe the sins which now you love, and so shall come to conquer them for yourself.'"

"And did you believe all this?" inquired the wise man.

"I did," the woman answered.

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"You were easily comforted," said he. "But what has it to do with me?"

"You shall hear," replied the woman. "This, of which I have told you, happened years ago, and, from that time forward, I turned my back on my old life. At first, I and my babe were like to starve, but at last I found honest work for my hand to do, and at that I toiled diligently, seeking to make amends for the past, and to follow after Him who had done such wondrous things for me.

"But, not long since, there came upon me a great temptation. The man, for whose sake I had first sinned, found me out, and told me that he loved me, and had long ago sought for me, to make me his wife. He said that the woman whom he had married, when he gave up all hope of finding me, was his wife in name only. He said that if I would but go to him—I and his child, for he had no other child of his own—he would make our little one's future his care, and would watch over us, and work for us to his life's end."

"And what did you?" asked the wise man.

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“I sent him away, telling him that I must have time to consider. And when he was gone, I left my home, and fled, with my little one, where he could no longer find me.”

“Why so?” inquired the wise man.

“Because I loved him, as we women—God help us!—sometimes love the men whom we have most cause to hate,” cried the woman passionately. “But though I fled thus, from the temptation to which I dared not trust myself, my empty, aching heart cried out for him, day and night, till I grew to loathe the very sunshine that shone upon a world where he and I were parted; and but for the fact that I could not so sin against the command of Jesus, my Master, I had cast my scruples to the wind, and gone to the man I loved.

“And then it was, at this supreme crisis in my life, when all my world was unsettled, and when I most needed help and strength from without, that your book, in which you seek to destroy humanity’s faith in the Saviour, was put into my hand. My heart told me that its teaching was false, but it is easy to believe the

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thing we wish to believe ; and so it came about that I tried to persuade myself that your arguments were unanswerable, and to persuade myself, also, that my faith was shaken, and that as I no longer believed in the Christ, I need no longer count myself subject to His command.

“It is thus that we men and women palter with our conscience, declaring that our life is the outcome of our creed, whereas our creed is too often the outcome of our life.

“I need tell you no more, except that I was saved from the sin I would have committed by the death of him, for love of whom I would once more have sinned.

“But from the man or woman who has played false with conscience, a dreadful reckoning is ever exacted. I had strangled the voice of God within me, as a woman strangles the cry in the throat of the child whose voice, were it heard, would make known her shame. And now, though I would believe again, I cannot, for the heart of me is dead, is dead, and I have sent for you—you who are

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so wise—to ask what you have to give me—a dying woman—in place of the faith I have lost ? ”

But the wise man was silent, and when next I looked, he was gone, and the woman lay dead.

IV

ONCE more, in my dream, I saw, as in a glass, a picture of a Christless world.

A strong man, the working of whose face was terrible to behold, stood, in impotent anguish, looking down upon the death-throes of his only child. The little figure which had been wont to leap with joy at sight of him ; that he had many times caught up (oh ! so tenderly !) to toss at arm's length aloft, or to carry bundle-wise in his arms, that he and she might be the first to welcome the new rose just opened in the garden, lay with her limbs drawn up—like the claws of a dead bird—to her body.

The shining curls, yellow as fine spun flax, soft as thistle-down, were damp and dull with the dews of death. And oh ! the poor, pinched, suffering little face that had so often lain against

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his! Oh! the grey shadows around the eyes, which had looked sometimes into his eyes, as if they saw down into his soul, as over the brink of a well;—as if that little child had been God's Sentry, set to guard the gates of the Kingdom of the Pure. How often before the challenging "Stand and make answer!" of those eyes,—the questioning "Thus am I. Say now what art thou?" had his own eyes fallen!

And now he must stand by with idle, helpless hands while the fingers of an invisible enemy are, minute by minute, strangling the life-breath in that little throat.

She is gone. . . . He is childless. . . . The baby life, to have saved which he would have laid down his own life gladly, is at end. The little soul, which was dearer to him than his own soul's hope of immortality, is fled. And as the terrible realisation of his loss comes over him, the old faith of his childhood reasserts itself for one moment, and, falling upon his knees, the stricken father-heart prays aloud in his anguish :

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“Lord Jesus, Lover of little children! Take Thou my little maid. If she be with Thee, all is well. Guard her, dear Lord, till I come to Thee for her.”

And then he remembers that there is no Jesus, it may be even that there is no God, and that he knows no more of what has become of that little life, which owed its being to his life, than he knows of the bubble that bursts with the breaking wave. And despair takes him.

But in heaven I saw the Divine Figure of the Man of Sorrows; and lo! on His bosom lay the little child.

And, looking down with streaming eyes upon the childless father, the Christ cried out, as in the days when He had walked the fields of Palestine :

“O! My people! My people! whom I have carried in My heart, as a mother carries her unborn babe beneath her bosom! O brother! O sister! at sight of whose sorrow this soul of Mine has uttered a more terrible cry than any

The Child, the Wise Man

cry thou hast uttered for a sight of the loved faces thou hast lost !

“ How often would I have comforted thee !
How often would I have gathered thee to My heart, as now I gather this little one,—and thou wouldst not.

“ Yet though thou wilt not bear My Cross, I may, and will, for ever, bear thine, even as I bear away from thee the burden of all thy sins.

“ And though thou hast forsaken and denied Me utterly, yet will I never forsake thee to all eternity ! ”

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And on earth the wise men sat and smiled to think how wise they were, and that by their wisdom they had for ever destroyed the Religion of Sorrow.

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And, in the Kingdom of Darkness, Satan sat smiling to himself, and at them ; for though he knew he was very wise, he knew, too, that many a little child is wiser than himself or than they.





A WOMAN, who was very fair, lay with her new-born babe at her bosom ; and as she lay, a Spirit, clad in shining robes, appeared unto her, saying : “ Look, that thou mayest behold the Birth of a Soul ! ”

Then the woman looked, and saw, as through a silver mist, a realm—whether far-off or near, she knew not—over which there rested a light as serene as that of moonlight softened by clouds.

Many forms she saw therein, among which was one that was like unto her own babe. Then turning to the Spirit, she said : “ What place is this ? and whose is yonder child ? ”

The Spirit made answer : “ The place which thou seest is the Abode of Souls, and the child is the soul of thine own babe.”

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But the woman laughed, saying : "That may not be, seeing that my child is alive, and lies even now upon my bosom. It were more easy for thee to persuade me that the thing which I behold is my own soul, than that it is the soul of my child!"

"What, then, is the thing which thou callest thy 'soul'?" asked the Spirit.

"I cannot tell," replied the woman.

Then said the Spirit : "Whenever a human being is born into the world, there is born in the Abode of Souls that human being's spiritual counterpart. Thy soul abidest there, as does the soul of every other human creature ; and as is the growth of thy body on earth, so is the growth of thy soul in the Abode of Souls."

"Myself is where my body is, and there only," said the woman ; "and if, as thou sayest, there is elsewhere another self which thou callest my 'soul,' then is that other self not truly I."

But the Spirit made answer : "Thy soul is more truly thyself than thou art, for thy

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soul is what thou really art. The thing which I see before me, which thou callest thyself, is but what thou seemest to be. Thy outward and bodily self may be white and fair, but if thine inner and real self be evil and unclean, then will thy soul be evil and unclean to look upon, so that thou shalt be known even as thou art. The thing which thou didst in public, calling upon all men to witness, shall not be more manifest than the thing which thou didst steal away in secret to commit. Thou didst double-lock thy chamber-door, that none might see thee, but I tell thee that every deed thou doest in the body—nay, not only every deed which thou doest, but the most secret thought of thine inmost heart,—is recorded upon the face of thy soul, and cannot be hid.”

Then said the woman: “Why tellest thou *me* these things? Are, *my* sins greater than the sins of others, that thou speakest thus? Are there not murderers and adulterers, thieves and Sabbath-breakers enough, that thou comest to *me*, who am none of these?

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My sins, which are not many, I have long since repented, and lo! thou revilest me, as if I were the chief of sinners!

Then said the Spirit: "If thou hast truly repented of thy sins, then is it well with thee indeed!

"But for every sin which thou hast remembered and of which thou hast repented, there are myriads which thou hast forgotten. Dost thou think that because the very memory of them has passed from thy mind, so that they have become to thee as though they had never been, that for this reason they are *not*?

"I tell thee that in the day wherein thou shalt look upon thine own soul, be it fair or foul, and see it in all its nakedness—the day which men speak of as the 'Day of Judgment,' thou shalt see the least of these unremembered, unrepented sins, writ large upon the face of thy soul.

"But—answer me, ere I go from thee: Is there any one under thy roof or among those whose lives thou art able, for good or

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'for evil, to influence, upon whose soul thou dost seek to look?'

And the woman made answer: "The souls of all who are under my roof, I know, and need not to see; but one there is, my neighbour, who is very fair, and concerning whom I am curious. Show me, then, her soul, that I may learn whether what men say of her be true or untrue."

But the Spirit said: "God hath not revealed unto thee a vision of souls that so thou mayest gratify an idle curiosity, but that thou mayest realise thy responsibilities and profit thereby.

"And dost thou indeed think that thou knowest the souls of all them that dwell under thy roof, or that there is any one on earth, who knoweth even his own soul, as it is in the sight of God?

"The heart of man resembles a secret chamber wherein stands—like the block of white unhewn marble, set in the studio of a sculptor—a veiled figure. Though the man may not so much as lift the corner of the

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veil, yet must he forever and in secret work to fashion and to form the figure that lies beneath.

“And the figure is the Soul of the man, and the unveiling thereof is called death; and until the figure be unveiled, the man scarce knoweth what manner of man he is.

“And I tell thee that—so far from knowing the souls of all them who dwell under thy roof—there are some, among thy nearest and dearest, into the secret places of whose heart thou hast never looked, and of whose real self thou knowest scarce more than thou knowest of the stranger in the street.

“Is there no speck in thine own heart, or in thine own past, which thou wouldst wish that the husband, whose soul thou countest one with thine, should see with *thy* eyes, rather than with *his*, and which thou wouldst not hesitate to reveal in all its nakedness? And dost thou think thou knowest him better than he knoweth thee?

“The very child whom for many years thou didst scarce venture to let out of thy

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Isight, that so thou mightest keep him from knowledge of evil, whose innocent face thou didst kiss this morning, hugging thyself in thy heart that thou wast secure of his confidence and love—dost thou know that that child has already a life apart from thee—that he lives in a world which is created for him, less by thy teaching than by the talk of his companions—and that so far from scarcely realising, as thou dreamest, the existence of evil, it may be that he is already old in the knowledge of sin?”

• The Spirit ceased, and through the silver mist that veiled the Abode of Souls, the woman saw many forms pass to and fro. Some were fair to look upon, and some were foul. Others were neither fair nor foul; and some few she saw which she recognised readily, inasmuch as they differed but little from the selves which she knew.

Then said the Spirit: “Hast thou aught to ask about any of these?”

Pointing with her finger, the woman made

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answer : "One form I see which troubles me, and which I seem to know, and yet know not. Tell me, then, whose soul it is."

"Thy father's," answered the Spirit.

But the woman laughed, saying : "My father's face is wrinkled, and his form feeble and bent, but yonder figure is straight and lusty as a sapling, and the face thereof hath the bloom and the beauty of youth."

"The face of thy father is wrinkled," answered the Spirit, "and his form feeble and old, but years have not hardened his heart, nor aged his soul, and therefore dost thou see him young and fair in the Abode of Souls."

As the woman turned again to look into the Abode of Souls, there arose before her the form of a beautiful girl, who gazed upon her with eyes full of pity and love.

"Behold! the soul of thy sister," said the Spirit.

But the woman made answer : "The face of my sister is as ill-favoured as mine is fair, and yonder girl is more beautiful than I."

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Then said the Spirit: "Dost thou think because God hath chosen to make thee fair of face, and thy sister ill-favoured, that thou shalt be fair and she ill-favoured to all eternity?"

As the woman, much wondering, turned from him to gaze again upon the Abode of Souls, another face rose up before her, upon which she could not but look.

It was the face of one who had once been fair; but as the woman looked upon it, she saw something written thereon, which repelled her more than did the faces she had seen that were low and animal. No sensual vice had loosened the lip, bleared the eye, or bloated the complexion; but meanness had set its mark upon the mouth and pinched the nostrils; and sordid, respectable self-seeking and self-righteousness had made hard the heart, and deadened the spiritual nature more surely than vice or sin; so that the woman felt, as she looked, that she was gazing upon the face of one who was lower in the scale of being and farther from the

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Kingdom of God, than are the wretched creatures whom this world calls "fallen" or "lost."

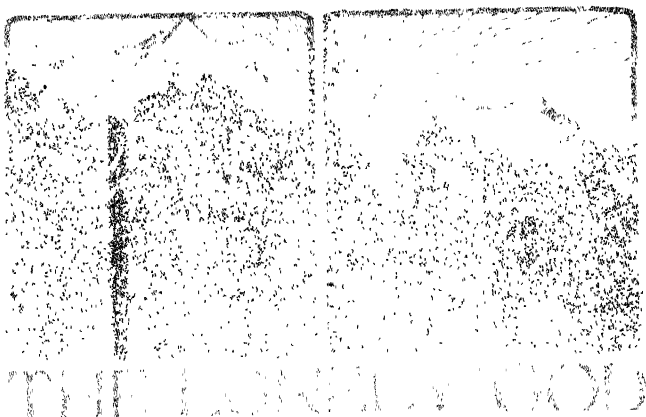
Then turning to the Spirit, she said: "Who art thou? and what is yonder evil shape?"

And the Spirit replied: "I am the Angel of Death and Judgment, and the thing which thou beholdest is thyself, and the soul which thou hast made."

But, laughing scornfully, the woman made answer: "By this I know that thou art a lying Spirit, whom I need neither fear nor heed: for behold! I have but dreamed a dream!"

And the Spirit replied: "*Thou hast indeed dreamed a dream, but the name of that Dream was Life, and now thou dreamest no longer.*"





A MAN lay on his bed at midnight, and dreamt that he stood alone by the sea, and that his hour of death was nigh.

From the gates of night and across the sea there blew a wind that made him shiver less with physical cold than with a sense of soul desolation and loneliness ; a wind which chilled the heart of him even more than the body.

And as he looked up to sky and stars his lonely spirit, losing itself in the infinite abyss, turned sick and giddy at the thought of dying, and reeled shuddering to earth again.

Then the man thought of the woman he

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loved, the wife of his heart and mother of his children, and that if he and she might but die together—if he might but set out with her hand in his, he should no longer fear to make death's journey; and, even as he so thought, he awoke with pounding heart and panting breath; awoke to shudder at the darkness and the loneliness, and with a nameless fear lying at the centre of life, like the lurking shadow of an unknown, unseen foe.

As he lay he heard the low breathing of his sleeping wife, and with a sigh of relief, and with all sense of lonesomeness gone, the man closed his eyes and fell asleep.

Again he dreamed a dream in which he thought that he stood in the presence of God.

Whether he had been borne to the infinite regions which stretch on and away, and yet away, and yet again away, beyond the limits of our universe; or whether he were still on the earth; or had soared to a distant star, or to the vast and void sky spaces that lie

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between the worlds; or had crept into the narrow chamber of the human soul,—the man knew not, but he was aware in some wonderful way of all that was taking place on all God's myriad worlds.

He saw circling planets sweep faster and faster on their ever-narrowing orbit, until at last they fell and flew, like moths to a candle, to feed the flaming furnace of the sun; and he looked upon his own home, and saw the billowy rise and fall of his wife's bosom, and heard the cry of the child who lay in a cot by her side.

He gazed upon burnt-out worlds, moons that had once been astir with life, and heard their cooling and cinderous surfaces crack into chasm and cave; and he looked into the bowels of the earth, and saw strange creatures breeding and sporting amid the central fires.

He watched comets, those vagabonds of the heavens, wandering gipsy-like between the worlds, or weaving out-lying system to out-lying system, like nebulous shuttlecocks

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of the skies; and he saw into the secret workings of human souls.

He looked upon the planet Jupiter, that laboratory of God, and beheld moving athwart the thin atmosphere, strange shapes, uncanny as a half-formed, prematurely-born babe, that seemed neither spirit nor flesh, but which he knew were the soul-embryos of creatures which, developing by progressive stages and from age to age, should, in the aeons to be, become beings infinitely greater than man, and scarcely less glorious than God; and he peered beneath the earth's surface, and watched the anxious running to and fro of innumerable ants.

Then raising his head the man looked into the eyes of God, and saw eternity lying therein.

And at that sight the man fell back with a cry like that of one smitten by the lightning, and with the very soul of him sick and swooning with fear.

But in a voice of infinite tenderness, God spake, bidding him be of good cheer.

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And God said : " Art thou *he* who feared death because of its loneliness ? "

And the man said : " I am *he* . "

And to him the Almighty spake again :
" Thou *dienst* alone, but I *live* alone ; and as is the sound which thou hearest in the hollow convolutions of a shell, to the roar of the central sea, so is thy loneliness to Mine. When God throws His arms around a soul and draws that soul away from its companions, and to Himself, then is that soul very lonely, *but the loneliness is but the being gathered to the heart of God.* "

Then said the man : " By Thee all that is in heaven above or in the earth beneath was created. Thou hast but to speak the word, and lo ! a legion of angels are at Thy side to bear Thee company by night or by day. "

But God made answer : " That which I create, be it angel or archangel, is but My creature, and can never be My companion. "

And again the man : " Thou art God the Eternal One, Ruler of Earth and Sea. Is

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it nothing to Thee that all men worship Thee and hold Thee in reverence?"

But to him the Almighty made answer :
"The thought of God is, to most men, but a plank to which they hope to cling when the waters of death are closing over their heads. How many are there, thinkest thou, who love the God they have never seen, as thou lovest thy wife and child?"

And the man said : "Thou hast but to say the word, and behold all men *must* love Thee."

But God answered him : "For the love, which I compel, I care not."

Then said the man : "Thou art God, the Omnipotent One. Sun, moon, and stars sprang into being at Thy bidding. Thou hadst but to say, 'Let there be light,' and there was light ; and Thou didst but breathe upon inanimate clay, and lo ! it became an immortal soul, clothed in a form divinely fair, and fashioned in Thine own likeness ; and man, the heir of eternity and image of God, came into being. To Thee

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all things are possible. Thou hast but to say, 'Let be!' to set at Thy side another God, like even unto Thyself, that so Thou mayst be alone no more."

And yet again God said: "That which I create is but My creature, and can never be My companion; and from My loneliness, even Mine own omnipotence is powerless to deliver Me.

"Rememberest thou not of Him who was slain on Calvary, that men taunted Him, saying, 'He saved others: Himself He cannot save'?"

"Even so from the loneliness wherefrom God saveth others, Himself God cannot save.

"The cry in loneliness that rang from Calvary's Cross rings throughout creation still. Thou lookest out into the night, and thou shudderest—not because of the blackness that broods between earth and sky, but because thou hast looked, as into an abyss, into the lonely soul of God. Nature is lonely because of God's loneliness. On every breeze is borne—were the ear of man attuned to

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hear it—the sound of innumerable lamentations, which is Nature's echo of God's lonely cry.

“God shudders—and, over the shining surface of the sea, a sudden tremor flits.

“God hides His countenance — and the sunshine fades from meadow and field, and darkness covers the face of the sky.

“But on the shadowless, shining peaks of Eternity, God sits lonely forever; and into His loneliness neither man nor Nature can enter. Nay, of such loneliness as God's, the soul of man cannot even conceive, for man's *death* is not more lonely than God's *life*.

“I am *the* Loneliness.”

The voice ceased, and the man awoke to know that he had been dreaming.

Outside the wind made moan continually, and from the tossing tree tops there came a sound like the ceaseless sighing of the sea.

For one moment the man gazed into the black and brooding night, whence it seemed to him that eyes of infinite sadness looked out of the darkness into his own.

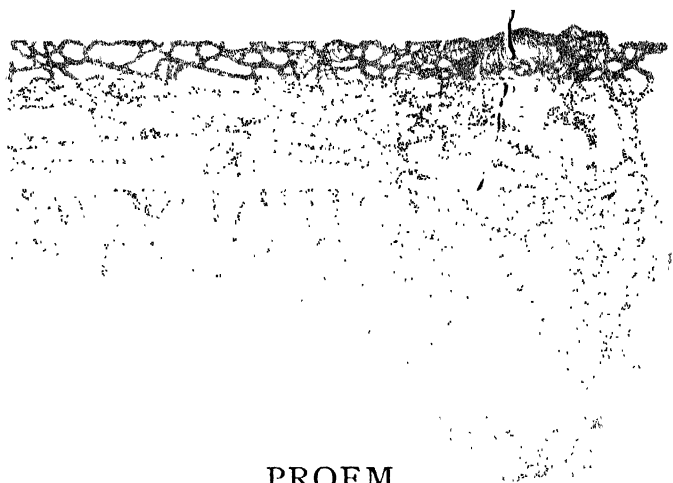
The Lonely God

In the next, he had drawn the curtain and turned from the window, that in the warmth and light of the room, and in the caresses of his waiting wife, he might cease even to remember that he had dreamed a dream.

Yet sometimes, as he stands and listens to the sea at midnight, there seems borne to him on every breeze a sound like that of innumerable lamentations, and then the man thinks again of his dream, and fancies that in sobbing surge and wailing wind he hears the cry of the lonely God.

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PROEM

THE night of New Year's Eve had come, and I stood under the stars in a garden brimmed with white moonlight and set around with trees. In the garden all was still, and the sky was clear overhead, but, low down on the horizon, Night was plying her spindle, weaving floating and fleecy cloud-flax into the dark fabric of cloud-curtains, to be drawn ere long around the sleeping place of the moon. As a veil of fine lawn might cover a girl's face, so suddenly a wisp of white cloud-rack drifted across the moon. I say "across the moon," but so undimmed was her splendour that one might have

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supposed the veil had been draped about her face, instead of drawn across it.

As metal is cut by a die, as flesh is cut by a knife, so the moving mist seemed to be cut through as it met the moon's edge. And so sharp was the severance, that when the cloud-rack which aureoled the moon was suddenly stained luminous cinnamon—as a cloth is stained amber or topaz by spilt wine, as the clothing of a duellist is stained crimson by a wound—it seemed to me as if the white cloud-rack were stained with the ebbing of its own blood.

Suddenly, faint and far, wind-borne upon the breeze, came the first chime of a church bell striking the hour. The old year was irrevocably gone—a year of sin and shame and cowardice, of mean aims, mean acts, mean defeats, and meaner triumphs.

Looking back upon the track I had trodden, it seemed to me like some slimy serpent-trail upon the face of God's fair world. I could not bear to think of it; and as an archer wings a shaft into the

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blue, so I strove to wing my thoughts, arrow-wise, into the as yet unstained future.

I looked upon that future as a traveller standing upon a hill looks at dawn upon a far stretch of unknown country.

As to morrow, and the days of the week which lie before us, differ not greatly from yesterday and the days of the week that have just gone, so, to the traveller, the face of the landscape before him—fields and lanes and highways, with here and there a common, and here and there a church—is not unlike the face of the landscape through which he has just passed.

In the immediate future there is no menace of that Unknown which is always the dreaded.

But beyond this near stretch of country the traveller realises that—hidden in mists he cannot pierce—lies a strange and unknown land.

And looking into the year that lay before me, I fancied that—glittering above the smoking plain—I caught a glimpse of the

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towers and pinnacles of a great city. The next moment, towers and pinnacles were gone, and I saw only a desolate land of dark, the shadows of bare rock and brooding mountain, and, beyond the mist, the utter loneliness of the sea.

“The coming year! O God!” I cried, “what holds it for me of good or evil? Shall my feet indeed tread the streets of some city of light which I have seen miraged only in my dreams? or shall they lead me to the sullen shore of Death’s inexorable sea?”

But on the night there came no answer save the answer of my own soul:

“To all men, even to the impure, God gives the gift of memory. But the memory of the impure is like an opaque-backed mirror hung on a wall. It shows only what lies behind. But sometimes, to those who are crystal-pure of heart, God gives, in place of memory’s mirror, a magic glass, as crystal-pure even as their hearts—a glass in which may be seen, not only the mirrored picture of what lies

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behind, but also of what lies before. These are they whom men call poets and prophets, and of all men they most resemble God, inasmuch as in a measure they share the power to foresee what is to come, as well as to remember what is past. These are the pure in heart, and thou art not as they. Therefore, to look into the future is denied thee. Look back upon thy past thou mayest, for the past lies hidden in thine own thoughts. But the future lies hidden in the thoughts of God, and, into the thoughts of God, the impure of heart may never see.

PART I

I

THAT night as I slept I had a dream of the future. I seemed to be looking upon London as it will be a hundred years hence. Changes had come about of necessity—changes in methods of locomotion, changes in costume, changes in many public buildings and public streets. Except, however, for the fact that parks and pleasure grounds had multiplied on every side, the London on which I looked was not greatly different from the London of to-day. One change, however, attracted my attention—many churches and chapels had entirely disappeared, and most of those which remained seemed to have lost their sacred character. At one time these churches had

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been among the most distinctive buildings in every quarter, but now, wherever one looked, huge palaces of entertainment or refreshment sought—if only by their very bulk—to shoulder all other buildings out of sight. Colossal of scale, superbly proportioned, these palaces of delight dominated the place in which they stood, as a pyramid dominates its immediate surroundings in the desert. Upon them had been lavished all the imaginings of the architect, all the magnificence of design and decoration which art could conceive and money buy. Nor did these splendours go unappreciated. Sunday though I knew the day to be, the theatres and music halls were open and filled to overcrowding. In the *cafés*, restaurants and drinking places, gaily-dressed throngs lounged, smoking, or sipping the nectar of rare wines and liqueurs. Bands played in the public squares; and, in the parks and open spaces, games of skill and strength were watched by eager crowds.

I remember, however, that what I most missed in this new world, thus given up to

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pleasure and delight, was the laughter of little children. Children there were, but only a few, and their faces seemed to have lost something of the freshness of childhood. It often happens that when youth and maiden, man and woman, love God, and love each other so purely that they take no thought of aught but of God and of their love—God takes thought for their children, that they be straight and strong and very beautiful. But when the man and the woman make not love their world, but the world their love;—either delaying marriage till youth be gone, lest by living simply they lose something of ease and comfort, or, if they marry, hoping that their union be childless, lest the dear and lovely burden of babyhood (a burden which no true woman would willingly forego) lie upon a bosom which, but for that burden, had been bared, not to the sweet pressure of baby lips and fingers, but to the eyes of partners in a dance, of fellow-guests at a dinner, or of utter strangers in a theatre;—when those, who love, thus take thought to evade love's sacred obligation, take thought of

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money and position and worldly pleasure, it often happens that upon the faces of their children, if children come, is to be seen something of the ageing anxiousness which had filled the thoughts of their parents.

The faces of the children, upon whom I was now looking, seemed to me strangely worn and wizened. They were like the faces of the children of the old.

Wondering at all this, I walked slowly on, and, before long, found myself approaching St. Paul's. When last I had seen the great Cathedral, hemmed in as it was among mean surroundings of mart and shop and warehouse, I had likened it in my mind to some magnificent tropical plant, the seed of which had chanced to drop among rank and closely growing weeds, and so, in the struggle for existence, had been compelled to tower above its fellows, that thereby it might thrust upward, to the light and to the sun, the purple closed-flower of its dome.

Now I was rejoiced to see it surrounded by spacious grounds, for these baser growths had

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been swept away ; and bole and branch and blossom stood open to the sky. As I drew near I heard, coming from within, the sound of cheers and laughter and stamping feet ; and a venerable old man, still hale of body and with the light of undimmed intellect flashing in his eyes, was coming from the portal, his face ablaze with wrath, as he shook off, as it were, the very dust of the place from his shoes.

To him I addressed myself :

“ Sir, what means this unseemly disturbance in the House of God ? I am but newly arrived in this country, and in this city, after an absence of many, many years ; and the sights I see, the sounds I hear, but most of all this sacrilegious uproar coming from the nation’s house of prayer, make me ask myself what change has come to Christian England that such things can be on the day of rest.”

“ Your absence must indeed have been long and your wanderings far and many,” he made answer with sad courtesy, “ if you know not of the changes that have come about in England and in Europe this many a year. If your

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object be but to mock an old man's grief at the godlessness that has spread like a canker in this city and in this nation, I pray you to stand aside and let me pass."

"Sir," I said, "believe me that I am one who has so long been dead to the world which once I knew, that all I see around me is strange and unfamiliar. That which I ask you, I ask in all sincerity. What means, then, this unseemly disturbance in God's house and on God's day?"

"Did God dwell in houses builded of men, He might often go homeless in England to-day," was the answer. "Know ye not that save for a faithful few, the setting apart of one day in the week for the worship of God has long ceased in this country, even as what were once Houses of Prayer have now been converted to the people's use as Places of Entertainment or Palaces of Delight?"

"Has this country no national religion then?" I asked.

"None," was the reply. "England of to-day is divided into two great parties—the Pleasurists

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and the Pessimists. The former preach the familiar doctrine, 'Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die.' They acknowledge no responsibility to any Supreme Being, nor to posterity, declaring that each is here to find in life what pleasure he can. The Pessimists, on the other hand, preach, as of old, that this is the worst of all possible worlds. They denounce it as a crime to bring a child into a world where all must of necessity suffer pain of body and fear of mind, until called on to undergo the final mind-agony and body-pangs of death. Suicide they hold to be no sin, since the sooner the human race comes to an end, the better for all concerned. Whether one be a Pleasurist or Pessimist is very much a question of temperament or of health, and matters very little in the end, since each is equally Godless in life."

"Is this then the reason why I see so few children, and that the few I see, look as if they no longer knew all men and women—even the veriest stranger—to be the little ones' lover and friend?"

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And sadly the old man made answer :

“ Very lovely is the confidence of childhood. We do well to speak of ‘King Baby,’ for the right, by which a little child shall rule, is a diviner, sweeter right and sanctity than ever was accorded to kings. It is the unalienable right, the royal prerogative, of every child to come into this world assured that its coming will set joybells of the heart a-ringing.

“ Ere that child came to earth, God stooped to take into His arms the tiny image of Himself, to breathe between the little lips the breath of His own life, to set upon the baby brow the kiss of which dreaming children think when suddenly they smile in their sleep. Then with infinite tenderness He laid the little flower-like form in the hands of an angel, kneeling to receive the precious burden :

“ ‘Out of God’s hands, and the hands of God’s angels in heaven, thou shalt pass into the care of God’s angels on earth. Thou shalt enter the world, speeded of God, and tended by the hands of God’s dear women, even as when thou leavest it, God’s dear women shall tend

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thee to the last, and God and His Son, thy Saviour, shall wait to welcome thy return.

“ ‘Go forth little one, and may thy coming make glad the hearts of women and men, for I have sent thee, I am with thee. Go!’ ”

II

THE old man's voice broke, and with pity that was wrathful, and wrath that was pitiful, he cried :

“ And now the little children, whom God has sent, are no longer welcome in a world given up to selfish seeking after pleasure and after vanity.

“ I say not that the world has grown worse in all respects. Many evils, which I remember, disfigure the face of civilisation no more. Crime is in many, if not most, cases, the result of upbringing and surroundings. Society saw this, and, seeing, too, that crime was a menace to herself—society, for her own protection, so ordered things that the incentives to crime are gone. Therein is the world the better, and therein am I grateful and glad. But my glad-

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ness and my gratitude cannot make me forget the fact that, the world has grown Christless and Godless.

“It is nigh a hundred years ago since the change began. Till then, Religion—though the world was slowly becoming secularised, and faith in Revealed Religion was on the wane—was still a power in the land. But, inch by inch, Secularism gained ground. At first only in the great cities, then like some huge octopus, she stretched forth her tentacles to the towns, making wherever she established herself, new centres, from which stealthily to protrude fingers that, as they neared a victim, shot out suddenly into interminably extended arms; till at last she laid hold on the villages, and, finally, sprawled herself obscenely over the land, sucking, leech-like, at the life-blood of the nation, crushing religion, cobra-wise, in her folds, and suffocating faith by her voided slime.

“All this took long to accomplish; and possibly Secularism had not throttled Religion in England thus easily, had not other causes contributed to the same end. During the first

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quarter of the twentieth century, there came to this country a season of unprecedented prosperity. Trade thrived as trade had never thriven before. Money accumulated on all hands, and at such a rate that some of those whose tempers had once been soured and their faces sharpened by the constant and irking need of money, at last became newly sharpened of feature and temper, because they could not fast enough devise new pleasures upon which to squander their wealth.

“At first the sudden influx of money into the land, with the consequent cessation of the necessity to work, brought no ill-effects in its train. The mass of the people abandoned themselves, it is true, to the pursuit of pleasure, but the pleasure-seeking took a healthy turn. Field-sports and games of every sort were ardently followed. Those who had formerly spent their days working at a desk, serving in a shop, or toiling in a factory or warehouse, were now for the first time, and for a great portion of the day, in the fresh air, with benefit both to body and to brain. Our

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national physique improved, and with it our morals.

“But in course of time the reaction came. Not all at once, for, to this day, those who occupy themselves in games and sports may be reckoned by millions. Once, however, let the necessity to work be removed, and it is surprising how swiftly the individual or the nation lapses into idleness, how inevitably idleness becomes self-indulgence, and how easily consistent self-indulgence passes by slow stages first into luxuriousness, next into licence, and finally into vice.

“The people grew more lazy, more luxurious, more disinclined to bestir themselves every day. Instead of themselves taking part, as of old, in the sports they loved, they now allowed themselves the luxury of paying other and poorer folk to play these sports for them, while they, inactive themselves, lounged smoking and drinking, to look on. And so insensibly the manhood of the race softened. While the people of England could afford to buy wheat from other lands, what need for them to till or

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to toil in their own fields? While they could travel long distances in cars provided with every luxury, why trouble themselves to ride or to walk? While they could pay Chinamen to work their mines, Lascars to man their ships, Negroes, Indians, and Arabs to fight their battles, and other mercenaries to fetch, carry, cook, scrub, bake, why task themselves unnecessarily? Their very children, the women at last ceased to suckle, laying the lips of their little ones to strange breasts, and leaving them when older to Ayahs to tend and to women of other lands to teach.

• “Then against child-bearing itself the women of England began to rebel. ‘Too long have we borne this heavy and unequal affliction,’ they cried: ‘Why should God penalise us thus from our birth—laying the burden and the suffering upon the weaker sex, instead of upon the sex which is strong? Scarcely are we out of our own childhood before this life-long humiliation is laid upon us, to rack us with ache in brain and limb and body; to wound, with crueller ache, our sensitive and shrinking

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spirit, and to terrify us with the threat of possible anguish to come. The Psalmist, being a man, could write merrily of the bridegroom coming "rejoicing out of his chamber." It was like a man to forget that every woman who of her great love, gives herself to wife, knows well that it may be her own death-sentence which she hears, when they two are declared to be man and wife. If she bear a child to her husband, and bear in safety, she is but as one who has been reprieved ; and has no assurance that a time may not come thereafter when the dread sentence will be carried out.

" " From birth to burial, the days of a woman are but cycles and seasons of sickness of body and sadness of mind, of travail and torture that must be faced with the consciousness that she may never live to look upon the features of the child for whose sake her travail and her torture are borne.

" " Let us make an end of this cruelty, of this life-long iniquity. Wives we will be, if so it pleases us, but mothers we will be no more. We, no less than men, have our individual lives

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to live, we have other vocations to follow than the bearing of children at the will of a man or at the bidding of a God. Of the two who are responsible for the coming of a child, one, and that one the strong and sturdily framed, goes free, while the pain and the torture in their entirety are appointed to be the lot of women, soft of flesh, delicate of frame, and exquisitely sensitive to anguish of body and fear of mind.

“ ‘ If God, as men assert, be responsible for all this, and for more than this, for if it happen that the child be born out of wedlock, once again it is the woman who pays, once again the man goes free, while upon the woman who, haply, is more sinned against than sinning, the direst and most cruel consequences fall,—if God, as men assert, be answerable for all this, is it not time that we women dethroned in our hearts the unjust Judge and dishonest Apportioner of life's good and evil, either refusing to believe in a God at all, or else setting up in His stead another God of our own to worship? If the Christ approve this cowardly, cruel and iniquitous scheme, then say we to the Christ :

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“ ‘By this we know that Thou wast but a man, with all a man’s injustice to women ; and though Thou dost claim to have shared, with Thy fellow men, all that a man may endure of human suffering, yet have we women no part in Thee, for though Thou hast shared all else, at least Thou hast never shared the heaviness and the anguish of a woman’s lot. We owe no allegiance to a Divinity—be he God or be he Christ—who has doomed unresisting, defenceless women to such a lot. The right of such an one to sit in judgment upon us, thus to sentence us and to cast us, untried and unheard, into such dungeons of despair, we henceforth and for ever repudiate and deny.’ ”

III

THE old man paused, white and trembling.

“ Blasphemy such as this one shrinks even from repeating, but so it was that many women spoke a century’s half ago, and so it is that many more speak to-day. That the mystery of human suffering, and, most of all, the mystery of woman’s suffering, gives cause and gives colour to their bitterness and even to their blasphemy, I who seek the truth may not deny.

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“ But creed is more often the outcome of conduct than conduct is of creed. To decide to disobey God, to persist in that disobedience, means that you have decided to do without God in your life. And when you have decided to put God out of your life, you are already an atheist by choice, and must not complain if you end in becoming one by conviction.

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“So it was with these women of whom I have spoken. Their denial of God was the result, the inevitable result, of a godless life.

“Even when I was a lad, in the second quarter of the twentieth century, I remember hearing my father say that the growing godlessness of women was the most appalling sign of the times. The women, even more than the men, had become selfish, sensual, and worldly. I mean not that all women were so, for the godly women far outnumbered the ungodly, if, alas! the ungodly outnumber the godly to-day. But no fact was so significant, no fact seemed more to menace the end of all things earthly, than the terrible change for the worse which had come over women. Among women of all classes, the drink-habit and the drug-habit were enormously on the increase. In ‘society,’ so called, the home life was almost entirely a thing of the past, and the majority of marriages were childless. The women occupied themselves chiefly in card-playing, gambling on race-courses, speculating on the Stock Exchange, and in wantonness which was all the worse—

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not because it led, but because it did not lead, to the Divorce Court. Violation of the marriage vow was so common as scarcely to cause surprise; and men, perhaps because of their evil living, had become too shamelessly craven and complacent to trouble themselves to make an exception by suing for a divorce.

“Among the women of the middle classes, the semblance of morality and respectability remained, but child-bearing had for the most part ceased. As of old, the man desired a wife, as of old, the woman desired a husband, but whereas of old, a marriage was counted to be crowned and made newly holy, newly honourable, and newly happy by the birth of a child—that marriage had come to be counted most fortunate where child there was none.

“And so too, among the women who stood lowest in the social scale. They also refused to bear children to their husbands; and if actual immorality was less common than among the women who constituted ‘society’—coarseness, even shamelessness of speech and action were only too frequent. Many of them were to be

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seen with lover or with husband, sitting long evenings through in the public-house, bandying unclean jests, 'and setting vile slanders afoot about their neighbours.

“When such changes can come about in woman—and, alas! we have gone from bad to worse during the last fifty years—one is tempted to think that the end of the world must be nigh. At one time the history of religion seemed to be written in the hearts of good women. They were the mainstay of morality, pity, purity, and of the spirit of utter selflessness, which is to be seen in all its immeasurable majesty in the Christ. Their very sufferings made them nearer to Him, liker to Him, than man can ever be. Every woman, most of all every mother, is, by her very nature, a Christian. Now one meets everywhere old women, young women, wives and maidens, comely of face and figure, soft-voiced, friendly-seeming—the ghost, the shadow, the mere semblance of what woman once was, yet seemingly happy and satisfied and in no way suspecting that the soul of their womanhood is gone—who tell you smilingly

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that Christ was a man, that God is not, that Heaven or Hereafter there is none. I am an old, old man, but to me, even to-day, the horror of it is haunting.

“The words ‘atheist’ and ‘woman’ seem to be the very antithesis of each other. That a woman might fall, might sin, was, I knew, possible; but that, so long as she drew the breath of life, so long as she retained her woman’s nature, she could deny or defy God, seemed to me unimaginable. Such a creature is a monster, a contradiction of the name of woman, the very apostate of her sex.

“The immorality of her renunciation of motherhood (an immorality which is, I believe, a greater offence against God, against humanity, against nature, and against the nation, than that she should be a mother and no wife) threatens, it is true, the very existence of our race; but remembering what women are to-day, I could go on my knees to thank God that at least such women bear no children.”

Again the old man’s voice broke, and he uplifted eyes and hands in prayer :

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“God of Hosts, Lord of Childhood, look down on this people, that corruptly disobey Thy primal precept and command. Thou seest that we are drunken of pleasure, eaten up of luxury, rotten of ease, as were the people of Sodom and Gomorrah and of Ancient Rome.

“Let there not fall upon us that most terrible of all Thy vengeance which Thou didst visit upon Ephraim of old, when Thou didst say, ‘Ephraim is joined to idols: *let him alone!*’ Let *us* not alone, great God, we pray Thee. Cleanse us of our corruption, purge us of our sin, even though Thou slayest, for it is better that God scorch with fire, or smite with thunderbolts, than that the sinful be left to his sin, and be let alone of God. For the sake of Thy Son, the Lord Christ, hear us and save us. Amen.”

In my dream, it seemed to me that God made answer saying:

“The prayers of the righteous avail; and because even now there are many among this

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nation who follow after My commandments, I will visit upon this people that which shall turn them from their sin. It has of old time been decreed that, of this world, an end should, in God's good time, be made; but whereas man has believed that the world's end should come suddenly and in a moment by fire, or slowly, by the dying out of life on the face of the earth by cold,—I, WHO AM, decree that in another way that end shall be.

“Behold now I make barren the womb of the world.

“Spring-time shall come again, but with it shall come no new flower, no new bud on bush or on tree.

“Spring-time shall come again, but with it shall come no new bird, no new beast, no new creature of any kind.

“Spring-time shall come again, but with it shall come no new child.

“Henceforth creation and procreation shall cease. God has said it, and what God has said shall be.”

PART II

I

IN my dream I looked upon the world, and, as a peach hangs by the wall, so the world seemed to me to hang against the wall of the heavens, like over-ripe fruit, ready to drop off and fall away from the world-tree which stands in God's great garden of the skies. The clock of the world was running down, and God's hand would wind it never again. The generation upon which I looked was to be the world's last, for the life of the world had become a fire that has no power to kindle new flame, and so must burn itself out into eternal dark.

The world was dying, but as yet the world knew it not, for many there were who discoursed learnedly of sun-spots and star changes, of

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diverted warm streams from the south, and floating iceberg islands and continents from the north, which, by chilling the 'world's atmosphere, had confused the seasons and so affected life on the globe.

But at last there came a time when, watching the more thoughtful and more observant, I saw upon their faces some puckering as of undefined perplexity. Just as at the approach of a thunder-storm there falls upon nature—even before thunder clouds appear—a sudden hush, a rumour as of coming disaster, which drives the cattle of the field, the creatures of the air to shelter—so over city and country there lay a sense of impending calamity. Men and women seemed dimly to realise that a change was taking place, of the exact nature of which they were not as yet aware. They would stop in their walking or in their talking to peer queerly about them, like those to whom familiar surroundings seem suddenly to have grown unfamiliar, but who fear to speak what is in their thoughts lest they be ridiculed of their fellows. Yet each day the faces, upon which

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uneasiness was written, multiplied ; and I saw that both men and women began to look furtively, fearsomely, strangely, at each other. And with reason, for now I saw that women were fast losing their woman's loveliness ; men, their manhood's splendour and strength.

In all the world there is no lovelight so divine as the light which shines in the eyes of a father, of a mother, at first sight of their child. In all the world there is no sight more sweet, more sacred, more solemn, than the sight of the little child lying sheltered on the bosom of the mother, who, in her turn, seeks loving shelter and shepherding from the strong man against whose protecting breast she leans.

It is in Fatherhood, in Motherhood, that men and women become likest God ; since in a sense they are permitted to share with Him the joy and the mystery, the majesty and awe and wonder of creation. For this were they born into the world, born as it were in the purple. When man and woman, youth and maiden, love each other purely and truly, then

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be their place high or be it humble, they become princes and princesses by right of succession and by right of royal birth, then to them comes naturally the voice and the manner of courts ; and when they marry, be their home cottage or be it castle, they shall enter it as prince and princess into a palace.

But they shall come to higher estate than this. There be who maintain that love and life are consummated by the coming together in marriage of those who love ; but so to speak is to misread the sacred mysteries. Is the means to an end of more moment than the end itself? Is it the scattering of the grain in springtime or the reaping of the ripe corn at harvest which crowns the husbandman's year? When a man becomes a father, a woman a mother, then is he a king and a creator indeed, then is she a queen, and crowned with the rarest diadem that womanhood may wear. It is that men and women may be drawn together in love and marriage, thereby to carry on the work of creation which God Himself has begun ; that earth may not be lacking in the

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laughter of little children, nor heaven in the lovely light upon the face of angels, who of their purity may see God—it is for this that God makes women divinely fair, makes men straight and strong and fearless.

But now from the faces and forms of the women upon whom I looked something of the fairness and sweetness of womanhood were gone; from the faces and figures of the men, much of their manly beauty and strength. They were like flowers upon whom the frost has fallen and that wither blossomless and seedless upon their stalks. They were kings and queens of love no longer, but base-born subjects and thralls of lust. And of their lust came not love, nor affection, nor even liking, but hatred and scorn. And of their hatred and scorn came fear—fear of each other, fear of foe, and fear of friend.

For now at last they knew that they walked a world whose days were numbered. What had been but a rumour in the air, a whisper in the ear, soon came to be murmured under the breath in the market-place, then to be openly

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discussed in the streets, and at last to be shouted from the housetops.

For spring-time had come again, but with it had come no new flower, no new bud on bush or tree. Spring-time had come again, but with it had come no new bird, no new beast, nor creature of any kind. Spring-time had come again, but with it had come no new child.

Wherefore men and women looked into each other's faces and were afraid, for they knew now that the end of the world was nigh.

II

THEN madness seized them. They were like shipwrecked sailors who, hopeless of rescue, and knowing that ere long they must be sucked under of the waters, seek to evade the horror of the last awful moment by stupefying themselves with drink. But that the winter of the world had come—that last winter to which shall succeed no spring, was now plain to all; and men cursed the fate by which their time on earth had fallen at such a season. “Why should we, of all earth’s generations, be thus singled out,” they said, “to come into the world, only to witness and to share in the world’s doom?”

“To our fathers and our fathers’ fathers,” one cried, “life was a V-shaped vista of happiness. A starting point there was, and this starting point men called birth: but the arms of the V opened out, broadening on either side,

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in a sweep so wide as to embrace the whole visible world, and stretching unendingly on into Eternity. Now the V of life's vista is inverted. We men and women walk its ever-narrowing sides; and as we walk, the point where the sides run together in eternal dark—the point where there is no outlet, and no turning back, is even now in sight. Where lurks he—god or devil—who has thus lured us into life's cul-de-sac? Let him come forth that we may have speech of him, sight of him, and curse him for a monster ere we die.”

Then, when the outbreak of blasphemy had spent itself, there came a season of reaction. As a condemned prisoner sits hunched or huddled in his cell, body and limbs ice-cold and motionless, as if carved in stone; the brain and the burning eyes of him all that is alive; as he sits, unseeing for all his stare, unthinking for all his intentness, every mental faculty fixed and focussed upon his approaching fate, so men and women sat or stood or walked apart. In the sullenness of despair the world was settling itself down to die.

III

WHEN again in my dream I looked upon the world, I knew that the end was not far. Some twenty years or more must have passed since the world's doom was first pronounced. Those who had then been children were now women and men. Of those who had then been women and men, some were middle-aged, others were old and grey, and many were dead. The faces of all were strangely changed, but whereas the men seemed stern and worn and haggard, the faces of the women seemed to me to have regained all, and more than all of woman's loveliness. Sad-faced they were, even as she who was honoured above all women ; but so beautiful, so divine, were they in their sorrow that it was not difficult to understand how it is that men and women can see in the

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Virgin-Mother—that supremest type of pure and perfect and sorrowing womanhood—something of such sacred beauty that they are tempted to forget her humanity, and to yield to her such homage as should be accorded only to her Divine Son.

Most sad it was to see the younger women gather around one who was stricken in years.

“Dear mother,” one of them said, “we were children ourselves when God called the green grass and the flowers and the young creatures of every sort, and the little children, back to Himself, and so we remember not the world as the world was then. Will you not tell us of it, again?”

“Ah! the world as it was then!” sighed the old woman. “I wonder whether any of us realised how beautiful it was? In those days the wind, which now blows scentless and joyless on our cheeks, would come on June mornings to call in at my window :

“‘Lie-a-bed! Lie-a-bed!’ he would say. ‘While you slept, I have been a hay-making this many an hour, tossing the mown sweetness

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aloft, tumbling it, toying with it, diving into warm, ungathered waves of it, as a swimmer dives into the sea ; and then, like the swimmer, coming laughingly to the surface to shake myself free of the sweet foam and spray of the fields, as he shakes himself free of the salt foam and spray of the sea.' But now the wind comes to us no more to whisper of the sweetness of hayfields, for the solace of green grass nowhere makes glad the eye. Dear God ! I had not thought so to have missed the grass. I am not sure that I do not miss it even more than I miss the flowers. In them, much as I loved them, I miss but the exquisite broidery on Nature's mantle. But by the loss of the grass, Nature seems to have been ravished of the robe which covers her nakedness, and she cowers, shamed, unbefriended, and shivering before me !”

“ Tell us again of the flowers, dear mother,” pleaded a listener.

“ Ah ! the flowers !” cried the old woman brokenly, “ the flowers ! The very heart within me grows faint with the sickness of my longing

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The earliest snowdrops—those nuns among the flowers, crystal-chaste and celibate from birth—which it may be, we first see standing—‘little Sisters of the Poor’—beside some humble door or in some cottage garden, wearing the white robe of their order, and with downcast eyes and drooped head, that they may not so much as look on evil.

“Sometimes I think of them as dear children who have crept too early from bed, and so stand with little bare feet and inclined head, listening for the step of old Nurse Nature, and ready, should she chide, to scamper back and hide beneath the coverlet of snow.

“When first I saw the snowdrops, I was as sure there is a God in Whom purity and love and loveliness abide, as if that God had Himself stooped down from heaven to give them to me. And never did this soul of mine utter itself forth in intenser, purer prayer than when I first saw the miracle of the snowdrop’s green and silver bells among the snow.

“Yet scarcely had I assured myself that this or that flower—the snowdrop or the wood-

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anemone—was indeed come, before it was gone again, and I remember, that to me it was as if I had let the angel-soul of some dear one from heaven come hither and return with cold, ungrateful welcome.

“The secret of the flowers, God never lets us make our own.”

“And now,” said another voice softly, “speak to us of childhood and little children.”

“Childhood,” answered the old woman, “was, in those happy days, the magic fountain at which we, who were old, drank to renew our youth. Looking upon those sweet child-faces, we grew young again, even as now, looking only upon the faces of the aged, we grow old before our time. Life was then an unending chain of flowers, which God’s own hand was, day by day, drawing upward from earth to heaven, and to Himself. Each of us was a single flower, a single link, upon the chain; and though many of those we loved passed upward and out of sight, we knew that they had come to a fairer garden, whither the Father of flowers and little children would one day call

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us, and whither, in God's good time, those we loved and left behind would follow in their turn. But now it is as if the flower chain lay bruised and broken. God's hand draws us heavenward no more, and we are become worthless as weeds that die and wither unwept. It is as if we had neither child on earth nor Father in heaven.

"Around our dying bed neither son nor daughter of ours shall gather in love's last tender ministry. Our darkening eyes no dear familiar touch shall close; our failing hands our children's hands may never hold in life's last moments, nor cross upon our breast when life has fled."

"A world without a child!" broke in another woman. "A world without a child! And women in it! One had thought that, finding herself in such a world, every woman had slain herself, or had not dared to be seen save betwixt the twilight and the dawn."

"Into London's river many an erring woman has leapt, rather than become a mother ere yet she was a wife. From London's bridges many"

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a poor creature, weary of a life of shame, has cast herself, and wherein is our estate more honourable than hers? A world without a child! Yet a world in which men and women, for lust's sake, make counterfeit love; for lust and lucre's sake make believe to marry—for how can they be man and wife, whom God has for all time put asunder!

“Sister woman, upon the very earth we tread, the shadow of our shame has fallen. This earth has become human as we are, a woman as we are, sterile even as we, our Mother no longer, since, because of our sin, she is pregnant with new life no more. Happy are ye who are young, for knowing not the world as it was, you know not what you have lost. A world without a child! The silence of it! Dear God, that silence hammers at my ears more loudly than the clanging of a thousand anvils. If, ere I die, it be mine no more to hear the fledgling birds telling their tiny beads of song among the branches; the milky call of calves to cows, ‘standing udder-deep in the meadow, and the

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lazy¹ bass of the deep reply; the high treble of lambs upon the hillside, now dying down upon the wind to a trembling sigh, now assailing the ear in a very storm of gusty and quavering plaint; if it be mine to hear all these no more, yet give me, ere I die, O God! at least to hear the patter of little feet upon the stairs; the soft pounding of wee fists upon my door; the babble of a baby-mother's chats and confidences and chidings among her dolls; the chiming of child-laughter—rippling and intermittent as of wind-swayed silver bells among the flowers—from garden and meadow and lane; the soft intaking of a baby's breath, what time the flushed cheek lies warm against my bosom; the placid sigh when the little one stirs in its sleep; the wee, fretful wail, which changes to low crooning and ceases contentedly as the baby lips end their search, and settle down to that sweet indrawing at thought of which even now this milkless bosom tingles and thrills—God of mercy, Christ of consolation, hadst Thou been woman, as we are, Thou hadst taken pity on us and pardoned us ere this.

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“Lord, in our ears there sounds the wailing of little souls unborn—little souls shut out and prisoned from the sunlight in some far place, more drear and cruel than any imagined purgatory, in which the souls of men and women who have lived and died must suffer for their sins.

“And as those who have taken life, think that they see ghost-forms beckoning to them from afar, so are we haunted by souls unborn, yet not unslain. We, who should have been their mothers, have become as it were their murderesses, since, because of our sins they are denied the gift of life. And ever these little ghosts haunt us. Little frightened faces look out at us from the dark ; little eyes grown weary of watching for the mother who never comes, follow us wistfully in the daylight. Little forms, oh, so cold ! creep close to us at night, crying out vainly for the warmth and food and comfort which we may not give.

“Dear God, Father of the Saviour, take back’ this curse from us. Add, if it be Thy will, anguish to anguish, labour to labour. In-

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crease, if so it seem good to Thee, the travail
and the pain a thousand fold : but have pity on
us and pardon us, and of Thy mercy give us
a child ! ”

She ceased, and my dream dimmed, but ere
it passed I heard the sound of many women
sobbing in the night.

IV

WHEN next in my dream I looked upon the world, it seemed to me that yet another ten years had passed, that thirty years had gone by since any new child, new bird, new beast, new creature of any sort had come to bring new life into the veins of an ageing world. These ten years had worked a terrible change. When travellers who have visited the ruins of some dead city of the past, wish to convey a sense of utter desolation, they tell us that, in the streets and public places, grass was growing.

There grew no grass in the deserted streets of London, when in my dream I looked upon the great city, for every manner of green thing 'was' dead. What had once been parks were now deserts of dust or caked clay. Every sign

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of shrub and flower was gone. What had once been avenues of trees were now rows of jagged stumps which, when the branches had rotted and fallen, none had been at the trouble to remove. Unsightly, grisly objects, they still stood on either side of the roadway, like decayed stumps in the jaws of an unclean hag. Offal and refuse had gathered in the corners of the city, blown scraps of straw and paper littered the streets. Nine-tenths at least of the buildings were tenantless, and bills declaring that "this commodious residence" or that "double-fronted shop" was "to be sold or to be let" grinned mockingly through windows, some broken and all grimed with dirt, as if in enjoyment of the jest of offering houses in which to dwell, shops wherein to vend merchandise, to a world which was so soon to end.

In keeping with the silence and tomb-like aspect of the city was the singular whiteness which the houses and public buildings had now assumed. As for some years all manufactures had ceased, and shops and factories were consequently closed, the pall of smoke which

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formerly lay over London was gone, and for the first time I saw the great city glittering in the smokeless morning air. The houses and buildings which had once worn the city's soot-coloured livery, had, in the absence of smoke, been rain-washed from black to grey, and from grey to white, and now stood bleaching in the sun, like tombstones in a cemetery. Dust and decay were upon everything. So deserted was the place that when, here and there, a solitary man, or perhaps a man and a woman, walked in what had once been a noisy thoroughfare—the uncanny clattering and echoing of their footsteps could be heard long after they had passed.

Had it been a waking instead of a dream-world on which I was looking, I should probably have asked myself whether it were possible that, from such a cause, so great a change could come—whether, in thirty years, a world, which had ceased to bring forth children, would already be approaching extinction or would let its cities thus come to ruin.

I have said, too, that in my dream I saw the

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“world” a-dying, for so at the time it seemed to me. Yet when, as must now be recorded, I learned in my dream that, in some parts of the world, life was but at its morning, that nations multiplied in numbers and waxed greater in strength, I saw no cause for wonder. In a dream, though all be inconsistent and contradictory, we ask no question.

And though I have said that in my dream, London seemed to me a deserted city of the dead, yet when in my dream I entered the cathedral of St. Paul, and saw a great congregation gathered together, I was not conscious of any sense of wonder or surprise.

Under the dome a space had been cleared, in the middle of which a venerable man was kneeling in prayer, surrounded on every side by a vast congregation of men.

“Weighty are the words of the dying,” he said, “wherefore, Lord God, we ask Thee to give ear. Already we are a dying race, our very existence menaced among the nations. For thirty years no child has been born to us, whereas the yellow races so multiply and

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increase that even now they overrun the world. Out of Africa, India, Australia have they driven us, and now of all our empire, of which we once boasted that upon it the sun never set, this our England only is left, and even now they are at our doors.

“They who were once our slaves threaten to become our masters. They whom we despised as heathen and uncivilised, now hold Christendom and civilisation in thrall. They have boasted, and called their gods to witness, that of the women of England they will make daughters of shame ; of the men of England, bondsmen and slaves to work a taskmaster’s will. God of Christendom, wilt Thou suffer this thing to come to pass? Take back the curse which Thou hast laid upon us. Give us but one sign that Thou hast heard and pardoned, and we will go forth in Thy strength to do battle with our enemies and to overcome ; but hear us, and haste Thee, for even now the heathen are at our gates !”

V

ONCE more I passed out into the sunshine, and as inside the cathedral a great congregation of men was gathered, so outside, gathered an even greater congregation of women, to whom a woman was then speaking.

“Dear sisters,” she said, “let us not forget that us women God hath supremely honoured, since, of a woman, He who is the world’s Saviour was born. At God’s altars, men may minister, but ere those altars were builded, God had made of our knees a thrice holier altar, at which God’s children first bowed themselves in prayer. By man’s voice God may speak to the nations, but, to the lips of God, the ear of every mother is laid. Wherefore is ours the greater sin, in that we have refused to listen. Wherefore is ours the greater shame, in that some of

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us have forgotten the seal of chastity which God set upon us when He chose a woman for the white casket which should bear to earth the Heavenly Pearl of God's incarnate Son. Let us therefore be constant in prayer before Him by whom all women are dear and sacred, since Him, in anguish and travail, a woman bore. Him, ere yet He was born, a woman saluted as the Saviour which was to come. Him, thereafter, good women hailed Lord and Master, faithful even when the chosen of His disciples forsook Him and fled—first at the sepulchre, as last beside Him at the Cross.

“Dear sisters, small wonder is it that we women bend the knee in worship and love to Him who is not only our Saviour and our God, but our Elder Brother, our Defender and our Friend.

“And when had woman such a friend as He? To Him the very harlot might come, knowing that, because of her womanhood, He held her honoured and holy. To Him the precious ointment, wherewith the Magdalen anointed

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Him for His burial, was less precious than her tears. When to Him they brought the woman taken in sin, for her had He no word of condemnation, save 'Go and sin no more!' whereas at those who cried out that she be stoned, He thundered that terrible indictment, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone.' At those words they saw themselves branded before God and man, for the unclean things they were; and shrank away, one by one, from that avenging presence, and from the challenging purity of those eyes.

"Small wonder, I say, that all that is holy in humanity should compel us to kneel to such a Master; small wonder that all that is hateful and hypocritical should cry out 'Away with Him! Crucify Him! To the cross.'

"Sisters, He hears us still, though we be sinful even as she whom He bade to go and sin no more. Sisters, let us kneel to Him in prayer that He may intercede for us to our Father and His."

For a moment the woman ceased, as, still standing, she raised piteous hands to heaven,

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and then while some knelt, some stood, some flung themselves face downward to the ground, her voice broke out again in prayer :

“ Lord God of the Living and of the Dead, hear and save. Thou wast the God of our fathers, and of our fathers’ fathers, of our mothers, and of our mothers’ mothers, even as Thou wast ours, ere we in our waywardness and wilfulness turned aside. Lord, we are like foolish children who would be women and men, and so wander from home, thinking of their own puny strength to battle with, and to conquer the world.

“ But when, bleeding and faint, and by the world cruelly mistreated, they would crawl home again—were it only to die—too often they have wandered so far that they can find no way back. And we, Lord, have wandered so far from home and heaven and Thee, that we stand alone in the world, orphaned even of God.

“ Thou knowest that we women have no strength in ourselves. Alike in girlhood, womanhood, wifeness, motherhood—if only by

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our very woman's nature—we, more even than men, have constant need of Thee.

“Since to our human comprehension it is not possible to picture what Thou art, Thou permittest us to think of Thee as our Father, perhaps because when we think of motherhood we think most of love, when we think of fatherhood, we think of love allied to strength. Yet know we well that even as Thou art incomprehensibly Three in One, and One in Three, so art Thou mystically and incomprehensibly Two in One, and One in Two.

“Thou art our Mother, no less than our Father; and sometimes to us women it seems as if there were more of motherhood in God than of aught else, as if only a woman could understand the heart of God.

“We women carry our child long time under our heart, even as Thou hast carried us next to Thine.

“We women fashion our children of our body, feed them with our own life, suckle them at our breasts, even as Thou fashionest and feedest and sucklest us. For their sake we

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yield ourselves, and gladly, to suffer, even as Thou, O God of suffering, didst sorrow and suffer upon the Cross for us.

“For them it may even be that we are called upon to lay down our lives; even as Thou, Lord of Love, didst lay down Thy life for us.

“Because Thou didst lay down Thy life for us, we ask Thee to forgive.

“Because Thou didst lay down Thy life for us, we beseech Thee to show us Thy mercy.

“Because Thou didst lay down Thy life for us, we beseech Thee to give us a child.

“God our Father, God our Mother, God our Saviour, we beseech Thee to give us a child.”

And from that great assembly went up a cry of sterile anguish, infinitely more terrible than the cry of a woman in labour:

“God our Father, God our Mother, God our Saviour, we beseech Thee to give us a child.”

VI

THE woman ceased as if strength had gone out of her. The uplifted arms dropped like dead weights and hung heavy and inert at her sides. The head, which had been thrown back, so that her face looked heavenward, slowly fell forward over her breast. She stood there rocking backwards and forwards monotonously, weeping meanwhile, the very picture of despair.

And again the cry welled up to heaven :
“God our Father, God our Mother, God our Saviour, we beseech Thee to give us a child.”

And then, it seemed to me as if, unseen of all, there stood among them One whose hands and feet and side were wounded ; as if, unheard of all, He spoke words that were like the death-cry of a God :

“ O sisters ! O daughters ! O children

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think ye that I, whom your every cry crucifies afresh, have heard unheeded. Think ye there is any sorrow of yours that I share not, and may not share?

“Dear mothers who have looked on the little dead face of the child that was so young, and yet had seemed to have been part of yourself, from all time; the child whom perhaps ye laid cold in his coffin, clad in the white garments you had worked to keep warm his tiny body in the cot—dear mothers, know ye not that never woman mourned a little one gone, but *My* heart brake at sight of her sorrow?

“And you, dear daughters, dear childless women, who desire and entreat the pangs of travail, crying out ‘Let this body of mine endure a thousand fold the anguish, if only, ere I die, I may clasp to my bosom, body of me, blood of me, soul of me, a very child—mine, mine, mine, in this world, the next world, mine, for ever and all time.’

“So have you spoken, many of you; but think you that any of you have yearned for a child of the body, as I, in the body, have

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yearned to call one single child My own, yet may not, since every child in the world is Mine?

“Behold now, I who share your sorrow, as no woman, be she mother, sister, daughter or friend, has shared woman’s sorrow before, I kneel with you to intercede for you to the God Who is My Father and yours.”

Again, as of old time in the garden, He knelt in prayer; and as He prayed so terrible was His agony that once again beads of a bloody sweat stood out upon His brow.

Upon such awful sight—God wrestling with God in prayer—it was not for human eyes to look, and turning away, I fell with bowed head and closed eyes to the ground. How long I remained thus I know not, but suddenly there came to me the sense of something unaccustomed in the world. What meant this new sweetness in the air, this strange stirring as it were at the heart of old earth, this loosening as of bonds, this feeling as of gentle thaw after iron months of frost?

Lifting my head, with open eyes I gazed

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around. The Sacred Figure of the Saviour was gone, but looking at the spot where He had knelt, and where His tears had fallen, I saw—sweeter, surer pledge of God's forgiveness than the covenant bow—the tender verdure of new grass, the wonder of white flowers abloom.

And as the breaking crest of a wave whitens in the wind, so suddenly, in the sunshine, I saw a living green break foam-like over the brown and barren fields, and tip with emerald fire the dead branches of bush and tree.

And by this sign men and women knew that into a dying world new life had entered, unto a dying race the promise of a child had come.

And to heaven went up a great cry :—

“ Christ has pleaded,
God has pardoned.”

And with that cry ringing anthem-wise in my ears, I awoke from my dream of a world without a child, to hear the sweet clamour of a little voice calling “ Father! dear father!” at my door.

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